

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT — AMALGAMATIONS — ELECTION COMMITMENTS**

*Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER (Mr M.W. Sutherland)** informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

**MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.03 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Premier for his numerous broken promises and dishonesty in misleading the people of Western Australia before the election in relation to the issue of forced council amalgamations.

The biggest political issue in Western Australia is the Premier's honesty. He is a Premier who is now getting a reputation in this state that is well deserved for dishonesty for the numerous broken promises that he has presided over, both in his first term and now in his second term in government. They are many and varied; members will talk about them during the course of this debate.

The Premier, as we learnt on radio last week, is rapidly losing the respect of the people of Western Australia because of his indifference to the truth about what he said prior to being elected and what he now says after being re-elected. The amazing thing about the Premier is this: he does not actually understand when he is saying contradictory things in the same sentence, he does not actually understand when he says directly contradictory things one sentence after the other, and he then denies he said something in the course of the earlier conversation. He has an amazing capacity to not understand when he is being dishonest, and we see it regularly. We saw it last week when he claimed that the Treasurer had suffered a consequence for his indiscretions when he had not —

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I draw your attention to the contents of your motion, and it is that this house condemns the Premier for his numerous broken promises and dishonesty in misleading the people of Western Australia before the election in relation to the issue of forced council amalgamations. The motion is about forced council amalgamations. Therefore, you have to restrict your arguments to forced council amalgamations.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Mr Speaker, you will note in the first sentence that it says “numerous broken promises”, which obviously is a broader issue than just simply council amalgamations—that is, I would have thought, the plain English reading of that motion.

But I am happy to abide and talk about council amalgamations, because the Premier was dishonest with the council amalgamation issue before the state election. The amazing thing is that his own party room knows and understands that he was dishonest about this issue before the election. Two weeks out from the poll, the now Minister for Local Government went out there and said plainly to the people of Western Australia that he got it wrong when he said there was a forced amalgamation agenda: “There is no forced amalgamation agenda.” He put out a statement in black and white denying that the government had any agenda of the sort. I told the state's press at that time that I did not believe the government and that it did have a forced amalgamation agenda. What did the media do? They ran off and interviewed the Premier. They put the camera in front of him and asked him about it, and he said, “No, we don't. The opposition is misleading once again.” Two weeks before the state election, that is what happened. If people wonder why I am annoyed about the Premier's honesty, it is because I said something in the heat of an election campaign and I was told there was no story there because he would deny it directly to the cameras. He was deliberately dishonest to the people of Western Australia two weeks prior to the election about this issue. Is there any wonder there is uproar inside the Liberal Party on this issue? Is there any wonder there is uproar in many communities around suburban Perth about this issue? Is it any wonder that the people across the state are now realising that this is a dishonest Premier when he does things like he has done? His colleagues are now seeing it. The Premier's colleagues, Liberal members of Parliament, many of goodwill, who represent areas that will lose their local representation from their local councils, were not even asked about these issues. The people of Belmont, the people of Fremantle, the people of Vincent and the people of Serpentine–Jarrahdale will all, without any say from their local member of Parliament and without any local say about this issue, lose their local say by their local authority. The only way I can advise all those people throughout suburban Perth to voice their objection to this is to vote against their local Liberals, because their local Liberals are the ones who are allowing this to happen. The local Liberals who are not standing up to the dictatorial tendencies of this Premier are allowing this to happen by their silence and failure at their party room meeting this morning to obtain a retraction of this policy and adherence to the policy that members took to the state election.

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We support communities that want to come together and amalgamate their local authorities if that is what they elect to do. We do not support the Premier breaking his word that he gave to the people of Western Australia just before the election, and that is why we are raising this issue in the Parliament today.

The Premier walks both sides of the street on this; he is the sort of bloke who would say black is white and white is black. He says he has always supported the amalgamation of councils in the western suburbs. There is a case, if the Premier had taken it to the election and been honest with people, for the amalgamation on a voluntary basis of those councils. But I note what the Premier said on 25 October 2006 in this very house about all of the councils in the western suburbs—Nedlands, Cambridge, Claremont, Cottesloe and the like. I quote the Premier —

These local governments work well and in cooperation with each other. Although every now and again one of them has a mini-crisis, generally they are well regarded by the community. From my experience, the people on these local councils are committed and work hard for the benefit of their communities. Their intentions are invariably good.

Now the Premier is out there slagging them off, whereas I have just quoted his commentary from a few years ago about those particular councils. The Premier said that the amalgamations are not being forced, but I want to detail the verbal gymnastics that he, his minister and the Leader of the National Party entered into on this matter prior to the election. The Premier said, “We are not going to force amalgamations.”

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Yes.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Minister for Local Government said in the lead-up to the election —

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.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** He wasn't a minister then.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** We have since learned that last week, on emerging from a briefing of all the mayors at the City of Cockburn, he said —

“We expect we will get agreement and it will all come together by 2015. But the state government has made the decision—it will stay and this will be put in place.”

He said similar things today in Parliament. In other words, by 1 July 2015 this model that the Premier has personally developed will happen irrespective of local views. He also said that he will remove from local communities the right to at least have a say on these issues—the so-called Dadour provisions, which I might add were put back into the Local Government Act in 1995 when the Premier was deputy Liberal leader. When there was a complete rewrite of the Local Government Act, the then deputy Liberal leader, as part of the cabinet at that time, ensured that that would remain in the Local Government Act when it was passed by this house.

I will quote the irretrievably honest Minister for Local Government, who I think has a well-deserved reputation for telling the truth.

An opposition member: He's gone grey.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** He has gone very grey in recent days. He said, “At the end of the day if we still can't get an agreement, then we will have to enforce that, yes.” In other words, he has admitted what the Premier will not admit—that these amalgamations will be forced if intimidation over the next couple of years does not work. We now know that councils will be forced to amalgamate even if they do not want to. That is forced amalgamation and that is contrary to the Premier's promise before the election. Local areas will lose the capacity to vote on these issues because, as he said at his briefing, two local government mayors will lose the capacity to hold a poll of local electors because, as the Premier said, “We don't want minority groups deciding these things”—in other words, the people of the local area. We have also learnt that the Minister for Regional Development has secured some sort of arrangement—we do not know exactly what; it was a very unclear statement compared to what he said in the press last week—for regional areas. There is one rule for the city and another rule for the regions in Western Australia.

If the Premier was of goodwill and was honest, he would have explained his intentions to the people before the election. When asked directly he would not have run away; he would not have shown the cowardice he has shown on this issue when he did not reveal what he was going to do. He would have done that before the election. Our view has always been to support communities coming together when they prefer to work out an arrangement that will work, and we can work in conjunction with them. We know that South Perth and Victoria

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Park were looking at that arrangement and that Bassendean and Bayswater were on the verge of an arrangement of the same sort.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** I don't think so.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Sorry; I mean Bassendean and Swan were on the verge of the same sort of arrangement.

We also know the Premier has put his size-10 foot in it by making sure the casino, the big revenue earner on the southern side of the river, is removed from the Town of Victoria Park's control, even though as the then deputy Liberal leader the Premier divided the City of Perth and put the casino under the jurisdiction of the Town of Victoria Park. In the mid-1990s, when the Premier was deputy Liberal leader, he also created the Town of Vincent. He creates things then undoes them; he makes promises and walks away from them; he misleads people before the election and seeks to deny those promises with mealy-mouthed words after the election. That is the Premier's track record; that is what is happening. We know the people of Western Australia are on to him because there is now a very significant issue concerning his honesty in this state.

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah)** [3.14 pm]: We would not be having this debate this afternoon if the Premier and the Liberal Party had told the truth before the March 2013 election. We would not be having this debate if the Premier had been honest with the people of Western Australia on the issue of council amalgamations, particularly those in the metropolitan area. There is no doubt that the promise to not force amalgamations on councils in the metropolitan area joins a long list of broken promises by this government. It is unequivocal. It is a long list of broken promises that the Premier, his minister and his government are guilty of. When we look back at a number of the statements made by the Premier and the now Minister for Local Government on council amalgamations, it is very clear that he has not told the truth to the people of Western Australia. He did not tell the truth before the election and he broke a promise that he made to the people on a number of occasions before the election. He, his minister and the government are guilty of misleading the people.

But it is important that we look not just at some of the comments made by the Premier and the Minister for Local Government. Let us also look at some of the other comments made by members opposite on discussions around council amalgamations. I will quote from a press release that says, quite simply —

“While we support local shires that want to partner with surrounding communities to better deliver services, we would never support compulsory amalgamations.”

“It is vitally important that regional communities can retain their local decision making powers and their unique identities.

“Local decision making is at the heart of everything we do, that's why we strongly oppose forced amalgamations.”

That is from a press release by Hon Mia Davies, the now member for Central Wheatbelt.

**Mr P.B. Watson:** Shame! Shame!

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The promise made by that member and the National Party regarding compulsory amalgamations was starkly clear. Then, of course, we learnt only last week that a so-called deal was made between the Premier and the Leader of the National Party supposedly that the National Party would support amalgamations of councils in the metropolitan area as per the plan released last Tuesday in return for a clear separation, if we like, or non-support of amalgamations in regional and country areas. On the way to the Premier's cabinet meeting last Monday, those were the questions put to the Leader of the National Party and it was he who highlighted “the deal”. “The deal” was his phrase, not mine. The deal was focused on an arrangement made by the Premier and the National Party that the National Party would support his plan to forcibly amalgamate councils in the metropolitan area in return for protection from forced amalgamation of councils in regional Western Australia. Is the Premier now saying that deal did not happen or was the Leader of the National Party telling a fib when he said it happened? The fact is the Leader of the National Party said it happened. He said an arrangement had been made in cabinet to protect regional Western Australia from any forced amalgamations. What did the Premier say on Tuesday when he released the maps of the 14 new local government areas in metropolitan Western Australia when he was quizzed about the issue of a deal? He said that no deal had been made. In fact, he said, “After these amalgamations go through, look out regional Western Australia; look out regional areas or regional cities or regional communities in Western Australia, because you're next”. That is what he said! That is completely at odds with the so-called deal which the Leader of the National Party claimed had been struck and which was reinforced by comments like those of the member for Central Wheatbelt before the election last year, when she very clearly said, “We will not support forced amalgamations.” That is what the member for Central Wheatbelt said, did she not? She said it! It is in writing!

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She said it! Now the National Party is going to go in and do a deal with this man, this dishonest Premier! Is the National Party going to go and do a deal? The member for Central Wheatbelt told a fib to the people of her electorate when she promised them she would not support forced amalgamations! Let us look at some of the other members, such as the member for Belmont.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members! Member for North West!

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** The member for Belmont was obviously shocked and aghast when she heard the announcement on Tuesday of last week. The member for Perth probably did triple somersaults when she realised what the government was going to do to the Town of Vincent—slice it in half and throw some of it into the City of Stirling, and the rest, of course, into the City of Perth—after the Liberal Party, before the last election, promised there would be no forced amalgamations. The words of the now Minister for Local Government will come back to haunt him. In July last year, before he was the Minister for Local Government, he said to his constituency—his own people in the local government area of Serpentine–Jarrahdale, which has now been jettisoned off to the City of Armadale—“I don’t believe in super councils because they attack the community spirit and the elements of community.” That is what he said. Does he want to be reminded of when he said it, because I can show him? He said it in July last year, and the headline was “Super councils don’t work: Simpson”. His shire president even said, “It is pleasing to see that our local member is getting behind us in trying to maintain our community identity.” Does the minister know what the shire president said after the announcement last Tuesday? He said that he and his community had been lied to. That is what a number of mayors, presidents or leaders of the affected communities said after the announcement last Tuesday. They said they had been lied to, and they had. We would not be here this afternoon if the Liberal Party had gone to the March 2013 election and said, “Yes, we will force amalgamations if the councils don’t amalgamate or agree to amalgamate.” If the Liberal Party had said that, we would not be having the debate because it would have had a mandate to do what it is proposing to do. But it does not, because it told fibs to the people of Western Australia, and the Minister for Local Government was forced, on 21 February, to retract the very statement he made at the famous Armadale forum—a breakfast with the member for Armadale—when the minister said, “Oh yes, we actually support forced amalgamations.” Then I know what happened: the phone call went out, the alarm bells went off, “Tony, Tony, Tony, Tony, what have you done? Quick, get out a press release!” So on 21 February the press release comes out, and the Leader of the Opposition has already quoted it, in which the minister said specifically —

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 —

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah, sit down a minute, please. I just want to read again to you what this motion is all about. The second paragraph is —

That this house condemns the Premier for his numerous broken promises and dishonesty in misleading the people of Western Australia before the election in relation to the issue of forced council amalgamations.

You are now condemning the Minister for Local Government. Please come back to the Premier, if you so wish.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** With all due respect, Mr Speaker, I find it amazing that you have said that.

Anyway, the guilty parties here are the Premier, his Minister for Local Government and those who sit behind him. They are guilty as sin on this one because they went to the election with a specific promise. The Premier did it to his own seat! In his glossy newsletter of the summer of 2013, there is a picture of the windswept Premier and an article regarding the coastal plan for Leighton. This issue was so important to his local constituency that it was the first item for discussion.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah, unfortunately I do not think Hansard can hear what you are saying because there is so much interjecting.

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** What did the Premier state in his glossy newsletter for summer 2013? He stated —

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

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The Premier did not tell the truth! He was grilled on radio last week, and the people of Western Australia have made a clear determination about what he said, and those people who got on—including Gary, Barry or Harry or whoever they were—said exactly the truth, which was that the Premier went to an election with a promise and he failed to deliver it because he absolutely broke it. He told people that the Liberal Party would not amalgamate councils, and now it is going to forcibly do it. Why does the Premier not just simply state that he got it wrong and that he did not tell the truth? That way, the people would recognise that there is now a long list of broken promises by the Premier and his government in the only four or so months since the state election.

**MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier)** [3.27 pm]: As I said during question time, and I will repeat, I do not think any sensible person involved in public policy and governance would be of the view that Western Australia in 2013 should have 140 local authorities.

**Ms R. Saffioti** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for West Swan, I call you to order for the second time.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Queensland—another big state like Western Australia—has twice our population and half the number of local authorities of Western Australia. This is primarily about metropolitan Perth, which has 30 councils. Some are large, with more than 200 000 people, like the City of Stirling; some are rapidly expanding, like Wanneroo; and others cover less.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Some councils are only the size of a primary school.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, thank you for that information. I call you to order for the first time.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Metropolitan Perth has several councils, including three in my electorate, that have a jurisdiction smaller than five square kilometres. They were little hamlets or suburban towns, if you like, or individual towns that actually grew up during the first 50 years or 60 years of the Swan River Colony. They were little staging posts; they were villages in their own right, surrounded by rural land. They have persisted today because no government has really been prepared to modernise the structure.

In the country areas, which will be an issue, we have the City of Bunbury; Bunbury should be the state's second capital. It actually, in its central area, has four different local authorities. That is what is holding back Bunbury. In the Pilbara and the Kimberley, the structures are pretty good. Look to the area north of Kalgoorlie.

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Mr Speaker, I am happy to talk, but this is —

**Mr P.B. Watson:** What about Albany? You amalgamated there, and it is a mess.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Albany, I call you to order for the second time. Just allow the Premier to make his speech.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** In the area to the north of Kalgoorlie there are half a dozen or so local authorities. Most of them have populations of certainly fewer than 1 000, some fewer than 500, and some well fewer than that. Would it not be fantastic to have an outback council covering that historic area to the north of Kalgoorlie that could actually have some standing in this state, get some public funding, and actually progress as the outback council and become a true and important tourist destination in its own right? Is that going to happen with six little local authorities? I do not think so.

The wheatbelt grew up in a time of lots of small towns—in fact, some of them were quite big for their day—limited transport, multiple sidings and multiple shopping centres; today, do we really believe that 42 local authorities in the wheatbelt is the right structure?

**Ms R. Saffioti:** Ask the Minister for Regional Development!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** You all shrilly say “Ask him”. I will ask you: do you think 42 is right?

**Ms R. Saffioti:** Ask him!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** No, you don't; you just admitted it!

**The SPEAKER:** Member for West Swan, I call you to order for the third time. I also want to tell you that I can hear everything you say all the time across the chamber. I remind you of the standing order about being called three times.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It is a fact, very small geographic areas —

**Mr P. Papalia:** Why did you make the deal?

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I call you to order for the second time.

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**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Very small geographic areas in Perth, that have over 100 years of history, were relevant in the horse and pony days but are not relevant today. In country areas, formerly reasonably large and vibrant rural communities are no more. Large-scale farming, mechanisation and a whole host of other factors have meant we have a structure that I do not believe serves country areas as well as it could.

Look at the City of Perth, Australia's west coast capital. Western Australia's most significant area of investment, with well over 100 000 jobs, the centre of the resources industry in Asia-Pacific, at the moment has a tiny area —

**Mr M. McGowan:** You created those boundaries!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Did I create them? No, I did not.

**Mr M. McGowan:** Weren't you a member of the cabinet?

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I call you to order for the first time.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Life moves on—move on!

An opposition member: Don't worry about that!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member does not even know what the original proposals were.

The capital city of Perth is not a residential area. There are towers and apartments in it but it is not typical suburbia. The capital city of Perth needs to have the status of being the lead centre of business and commerce, retail, sporting events and entertainment for our state. This is a growing state, and a state and capital city of growing international importance. Yes, let us have in the City of Perth the iconic Kings Park, the University of Western Australia, the new children's hospital and QEII, along with Royal Perth Hospital. Let us have the new stadium, the new Scitech, the Crown casino, the major businesses, and the major cultural and sporting events in our capital city. How radical is that! Members opposite do not even grasp it.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** Why didn't you talk about it before the election?

**Mr F.M. Logan:** Why did Richard Court break it up?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** If members opposite bothered to search the archives over at the Battye library or wherever, they would find articles written by me 20 years ago about the need for a capital city to be like that. Do a bit of research! That was long before I was even in Parliament.

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** There are major issues in metropolitan Perth. Transport planning is a huge issue. Perth has now gone over that critical size. Congestion is an issue now whereas it was not 10 years ago. There is the planning of sub-metropolitan centres of employment and higher density occupation. Fourteen local areas are built around metropolitan growth centres. Do we always want all commuters coming into Perth at the same time or leaving Perth at the same time? We need a functional metropolitan area where there is employment in local areas such as Joondalup, Cockburn and Rockingham. That is one of the many reasons why it is needed.

Management of the environment includes large areas of regional open space and managing our coastline in a consistent way. Instead of having multiple councils around the Swan and Canning Rivers, we need a manageable number. People now want good cultural and sporting facilities. They want large and sophisticated sporting facilities. Larger councils have the revenue base to build facilities of sufficient size, whether they be swimming pools, basketball courts, indoor courts, theatres or arts centres, to serve a viable and larger population. Members on both sides of this house represent areas to the south of Perth. I think I am correct on this: are members aware of how many Olympic-size public swimming pools there are south of the Melville aquatic centre? The answer is zero.

**Mr P. Papalia:** There are plenty in the wheatbelt!

**Mr M. McGowan:** There are two in Rockingham. There is one in Fremantle.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** There are very few. If members opposite go through that whole area of growth in Cockburn, Kwinana and out to Armadale, how many will we find? The answer is none.

**Mr M. McGowan:** I have just named three!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Very smart Alec.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** You asked the question!

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**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Because I care about some of the lower-income areas that do not have Olympic-size swimming pools. There are probably a dozen in my electorate.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** It is not in your capacity to count swimming pools!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Because the member has not done anything in his electorate to promote them!

Several members interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Mr Speaker, you were very assiduous in calling the opposition to order in relation to whether or not we focused on the motion. The motion was specifically about the Premier's honesty; it was not about the number of swimming pools in the south metropolitan area, which the Premier does not know the facts about anyway.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Probably the issue most rapidly growing in significance is waste. Local authorities, one after another, have said, "Yes, we can pick up the rubbish and we can put it in two different bins." By its own admission, local government is no longer able to deal with the complex issues of waste, particularly waste disposal. I believe that our rate of recycling is the lowest in the country. We still rely on landfill sites. Which local authority will be able to deal with that? Maybe the City of Stirling might have a chance; the smaller ones have no chance. They are actually carting waste by crisscrossing each other through the metropolitan area instead of having a sustainable, well designed and structured system. For a whole host of reasons, Perth as a capital city and metropolitan Perth into this century requires a modernisation of local government areas.

We could have walked away from this issue. We could have wimped it, like previous governments, but we are not walking away from it. This government has both —

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I will sit down.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** I don't care. Sit down then!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Oh, you are so immature, childish and rude.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Kwinana, I call you to order for the first time.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** This government has both the policy and the determination to modernise Perth and the metropolitan area. There will be groups that will complain about it. In my electorate of Cottesloe—in fact there are seven local authorities in the whole of the western suburbs—do members know how many people came up to me over the weekend to criticise it? None.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** In Toodyay!

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Where were you?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** In my electorate of Cottesloe.

**Mr M. McGowan:** You were opening a mine; I saw it in the paper.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** That was Sunday. I was there for a few hours. I spent Friday, Saturday and parts of Sunday in my electorate. Members opposite are just ridiculous.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Are you sure you weren't at the palace on Friday?

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The discourtesy of members opposite is something that I think the public will observe —

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** You called me a thug the other day!

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, I call you to order for the second time.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** This government has the courage to proceed. As I said during question time, forced amalgamations would require an act of Parliament. We are not bringing in, and do not propose to bring in, an act of Parliament to force amalgamations. Yes, we may well bring in legislation relating to the Dadour amendment, but we are not bringing in an act on amalgamations. Last Tuesday, the Minister for Local Government and I outlined 14 boundaries. Local governments called for us to put out our proposal—our maps—and we have done that. An enormous amount of consultation and discussions took place with local government. Not one person was surprised at the maps. Indeed, while there was a bit of protesting and the like, a lot of local government people said, "We agree; get on with it." A lot said that on the day and have been saying it before and since. Of the 14 boundaries, three are already in place because there is no change. Several will fall into place very quickly.

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Yes, some might continue to fight it out, but we have two years. I am confident, as is the minister, that within those two years we will get agreement on setting up a modern structure of local government for metropolitan Perth, and that will be a good thing. While the opposition carries on as it will—that is fair enough; it can do that—it might be interesting at some stage to ask a question. I will not do it now, but maybe the public should ask the question: where is the Labor Party? Does the Labor Party support, for example, 140 local authorities? Does the Labor Party support local governments of less than five square kilometres, and some down to three square kilometres? Does it support 42 small local authorities in the wheatbelt, or is it devoid of courage, judgement and policy? I suspect it is the latter, because it is incapable of providing leadership in this state. It demonstrated that in government with its disgraceful behaviour and it is showing it today. It comes in here and drags out newsletters and the like. We have answered the questions and we will go on and deal with local government, and in two years the Labor Party will still be arguing for the local government structure of 1910. That is where it is. That is the time the Labor Party was formed, and it has not moved on in 100 years.

**MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle)** [3.41 pm ]: On behalf of thousands of Western Australians, and of many in my electorate, I would like to voice to the Premier and to this house that they are not saying that there might not be merit in council amalgamations. They are not saying that sometimes it takes political conviction, skill and tenacity to take on these issues, but they are saying to the Premier and to this government that it is right and proper that the government should have taken that policy to the electorate before the state election, and that is exactly what it did not do. They had many opportunities to put all those arguments that they have put today —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Where have you been for the last three years we've been talking about councils?

**The SPEAKER:** Premier!

*Point of Order*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Mr Speaker, the Premier complained about rudeness before and you were calling people to order for interjections. I think the member for Fremantle deserves a little less rudeness from the Premier.

**The SPEAKER:** I have just called the Premier's name. Member for Fremantle, go on.

*Debate Resumed*

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** I know that callers to 6PR last week were able to put their views very forcefully to the Premier. I have been contacted by constituents, and I know that other members, certainly on our side and, I venture to guess, on the other side of this house, have also had constituents contact them to say that they are appalled by the change of position by the government before and after the election. Premier, that is why people are frustrated. It is not about the merits or otherwise of council amalgamations and it is not about the political will, skill or leadership required in this process; it is about the basic tenet of honesty that was required of our political leaders before the election, when the Premier and senior ministers were specifically asked about this policy question and the Premier said that his government would not force council amalgamations.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** And are we?

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** That is exactly what he is proposing to do. That is the threshold question. As I said, I believe that I represent many people in my electorate and across the state in their frustration with the government and the Premier on this issue.

Just briefly, I would like to raise a couple of other issues regarding my constituents' frustration over this proposal and the boundaries that have been drawn around my electorate—that is, that Fremantle and East Fremantle join with the Melville council. That is a lazy option that the government has adopted. In fact, it is contrary to the government's own Directions 2031 plan, which refers to centres of major economic activity and identifies Fremantle as one of those centres. If the proposal to join Fremantle with Melville is adopted, I believe that quite contrary civic priorities could be captured by that large council amalgamation. There would be a major employment centre at the freeway end of Melville, with Fiona Stanley Hospital, the university, St John of God Hospital and the like. There would be major economic activity there, and also in Fremantle. There is a lot of concern that there will not be a clear direction for that united council. Quite obviously, the people in Fremantle feel that they have very little in common with people in Melville. I know that in my electorate people are gearing up to let the Premier know how frustrated they are with that proposal.

Also nonsensical is a proposal to excise North Fremantle from any sort of amalgamated Fremantle council. At the moment North Fremantle is part of the Fremantle council. This amalgamation process will keep the port within the amalgamated Fremantle–Melville council, but it will excise the suburb of North Fremantle from that amalgamated council. In fact, the working port will be with Fremantle, East Fremantle and Melville, but the

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suburb of North Fremantle will go with the new western suburbs amalgamated council. We need the suburb around the port to be in the same council as the port. Because strategic decisions for the port will need to be made, that boundary is important, quite apart from the fact that the people in North Fremantle are also wedded to Fremantle and feel a strong identity with Fremantle and its wider community.

The City of Fremantle surveyed its residents, and three in five ratepayers supported merging the Fremantle and East Fremantle councils. They are not against merging councils, but they want to be involved in the process. That really is the threshold question here. People want to be part of a council that they feel connected with and that has something in common with their broader community. There are certainly options for that in Fremantle. They also want to have a say on this. That brings us back to the threshold question on which I believe the Premier has failed, and that is being up-front with the people of this state about what his plans are for what he says is a very important issue.

**MR A.J. SIMPSON (Darling Range — Minister for Local Government)** [3.47 pm]: It has been an interesting debate this afternoon. I must admit that since last Tuesday I have been very, very impressed by the number of people who have come up to me and supported our government's decision on this issue. Even chief executive officers, mayors and presidents have come up to me and said, "Thank God you've made that decision. It's been hanging over our heads for such a long time." Members have to understand one thing today. What we have done in the next stage of the reform process is send it to the Local Government Advisory Board. That is all we have done so far. Councils have until 4 October to get their proposals to the advisory board. We will go through the process of getting to that next level. We could sit here and do nothing. That has been happening. For nearly 100 years there have been no boundary changes.

**Mr P. Papalia:** You could tell the truth before an election, too.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** I have lost track since last Tuesday. How many have I forced?

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** None.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** None.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Why did you say you were going to force them?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** It is up to local government; the ball is in its court. But let me make just a couple of points about where we are with local government today. Let us have a think about the 30 local governments in the metropolitan area. If we were to hop in our car today and drive down Stirling Highway, we would go through seven local governments. If Main Roads or the Minister for Transport wants to do some upgrades on Stirling Highway, they have to deal with seven local governments. The interesting thing about —

**Mr P. Papalia:** This is about breaking your promises.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** This is about what is best for local government. What I care about is that local government has the capacity to deliver —

**Mr D.A. Templeman** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah! Minister, I suggest that you speak through the Chair and get on with your speech. Thank you.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

It is about delivering a better service to the ratepayers of Western Australia; that is what it is all about.

I will make a couple of points. The current situation within the Perth metropolitan area has been going on for a long time. Currently, the western suburbs have a river frontage for one reason only. Before the car and before the horse and cart, a boat brought the stores to that community. There has been no change since that time and the whole community has moved on. The local people who commute out of that area to use other services are not paying for that. The time has come for us to move on this issue. We cannot keep going through this whole process. If I hop on my pushbike and ride around the river, I go through 21 local governments, which are all looking after the river area.

The most important thing is that we have taken this to the next level. We have taken it to the Local Government Advisory Board. That is the point that we are at today. We have sent it to the advisory board. So that members understand, the advisory board is equipped to do the job. It has 28 weeks to go through the proposal and come back to me. So that members understand what the advisory board will do in that process, I highlighted this afternoon in answer to a question from the member for Perth that the advisory board has a very good job to do. It takes into consideration a council's current assets, and it takes into consideration any current debt that a local government has. It takes into consideration the local government's community of interest. It takes into

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consideration the councillors, the staff and the residents and ratepayers who live in that area, and it will come back to me with a viability report.

I will touch on a comment the member for Mandurah made back in July when the Robson report came out, which identified that in my area, Serpentine–Jarrahdale, Armadale and Gosnells councils will all come together; hence the debate about a super council. One thing made very clear in the Robson report is that we must ensure that communities of interest are kept together. One thing that we clearly understand more than anything else—I think every member would agree—is that the community revolves around where people live and the suburb that is built up through their community network. The important part is to make sure that the local government that services an area has the capacity to deliver services to the ratepayers. I think every member of this house would have been contacted by ratepayers in the past few years about the cost of their rates going up. One comment that comes back all the time to me as a minister is, “My rates keep going up and I’m shocked at the cost of the process.”

**Mr M.P. Murray:** Are you going to give a guarantee they won’t go up?

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** No. The problem with local governments that everyone understands is that the only mechanism they have to raise any money whatsoever is rates; it is the only lever they can pull. However, one of the best ways for local governments to put downward pressure on rates is with economies of scale. Local governments can deliver a better service with economies of scale. The golden rule in local governments is that the money coming in is only from rates.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** The interesting part though, member, is that rates have gone up an average of six or seven per cent a year over the past five years. They have gone up faster than inflation. We understand that from the government’s perspective, and I as the minister understand that.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, if you want to make your speech, make a speech. Minister, continue.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The most important thing from the ratepayers’ perspective is that services are being delivered to their community, and that is the most important thing that we are trying to deliver here today. As I said before, local governments have gone through no change at all. As a government, they have to deliver more and more services, and deliver those services to more and more people as the population grows. As I said earlier this afternoon, we have to accommodate another half a million people in the next 13 years in the City of Perth, and local government must have the capacity to deliver those services. Every member of this house would know the issues we have to deal with. As I said before, as I ride my pushbike around the river I go through 21 local governments. One thing that needs to be done is caring for the Canning and Swan Rivers, and it can be done better in that process.

**Mr R.H. Cook** interjected.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** It is most important that we have that process to deliver better services for ratepayers. The Local Government Advisory Board is best suited to take care of the next process. As I said at the start of my speech, we are going through the process to bring in legislation to Parliament to beef up the Local Government Advisory Board by increasing by two the number of members and also to give it the power to deal with more than one submission at a time. The advisory board will come back with a very contained report. As I said, it will identify where the actual need is. It will also look at all the assets of local government. People in my electorate ask me about the community they live in, and I restate that they will continue to live in the same house, same street and same suburb and to have the same postcode. The only difference for ratepayers is that once a year they will get a separate rate notice with a different name and logo. There are opportunities out there in the community and, as the Premier pointed out, some local governments have already come together and started their conversations. In fact my own department, the Department of Local Government, has contacted a couple of councils to start this process. The councils came back to us stating that 30 CEOs are meeting this Thursday and have agreed to meet with the department to work together uniformly instead of working individually. It shows how ready the industry is for this decision to be made. It shows that this is again about a government making some good decisions and showing strong leadership. Councils have already put their hand up to come to the table to negotiate and come back to the department for the department to listen to that process.

**Mr R.H. Cook** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Kwinana!

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**Mr R.H. Cook:** It's all about your honesty; that's what it's about

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** No, it is about delivering good government, it is about showing strong leadership, and it is about making a decision on this process. As I said at the start, I have not forced anybody yet. Wait until you see, members!

**Mr R.H. Cook** interjected.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** The most important thing to touch on is that this morning at the WA Property Council of Australia breakfast, when I presented our reply to the Robson report, it was interesting to hear the Property Council come back with the standard issue of one side of a street in the same suburb having one local government and the other side having another and each side having different planning regulations. It is clearly one thing that needs to be addressed. If we are going to have a vibrant city, as the Premier pointed out, we need to make sure we get some good planning. Also, to keep planning in mind, one of our local governments has not reviewed its planning documents for 26 years. It is way behind. All of them are way, way behind in getting their planning —

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** No point giving them to the WAPC; you don't get them back!

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** No, but the review documents have to go to the Western Australian Planning Commission and local governments have not done that yet. That is the issue; they have not done a review.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Right, minister.

**Mr A.J. SIMPSON:** It is all about making sure we develop a vibrant city and making sure we get it right. I must admit that there will always be some anomalies in the system. As I said at question time today, I took the opportunity to drive up and down Beaufort Street, and that was one of the clear things that came back to me at the Beaufort Street festival. But just keep in mind, members, that the current boundary between the City of Vincent and the City of Perth is Newcastle Street. The Northbridge festival seems to operate all right and does not seem to have a problem with the boundary on Newcastle Street. As we look at where the boundaries lie, I must agree that there are some anomalies in the system. Perhaps the Beaufort Street boundary will not work and we may have to move it up a bit. However, the proposals for the City of Stirling, the City of Bayswater and the City of Perth will be put to the Local Government Advisory Board to identify any anomaly that needs to be looked at. This morning at the Property Council breakfast, people from Perth Airport identified an anomaly. I thought that the whole of the airport site had been put into the City of Belmont to make sure there was clearly one local government for the airport, but interestingly they identified that a corner of the industrial area has been missed out. The most important thing again is that the Gateway WA project and the airport development will all be within one local government all the way through to Forrestfield and High Wycombe and up into the rural aspect of Kalamunda. The Mayor of Belmont was at the breakfast today and raised one good point with me. He said that the City of Belmont provides some fantastic services to its community with security patrols and so forth. He asked, "Am I expected to do the same for Pickering Brook up in Kalamunda?" I said, "Well, no. At the end of the day the ratepayers are entitled to the same service they get today but I am sure with the two coming together we can deliver better services. But I know for a fact, because I represent Pickering Brook, that they do not want the services of the City of Belmont because they live in a rural atmosphere and that's what they like living there for. They're not in that process."

I think the most important thing is that the government has come out and made a decision to go forward on this process, and as the minister I am very happy in this first week of Parliament. I have been very impressed with the comments that have come back to me. Negative comments have been very limited. One email came to my electorate office from someone down Serpentine way regarding the reform process. That is it, one email, to me as the minister and also to me as the local member. The most important thing is that we are making a decision. It is time for us to move on this issue. I am getting very, very good support from the industry and very, very good support from the 30 councils, mayors and presidents; they are all starting to work on it. I am confident that we can get our submissions into the advisory board by 4 October and I am confident that we can come to a deal with those local governments to provide a good outcome for the ratepayers of Western Australia.

**MR B.J. GRYLLES (Pilbara — Minister for Regional Development)** [3.57 pm]: There has been good discussion this afternoon about local government reform. Given that the Nationals are part of the Liberal-National government, it is important that I put my position on this issue on the record.

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 6 August 2013]

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One thing that has been somewhat missed in this argument is that the decision on the Robson review was made by cabinet prior to the election last year. The Robson review is about metropolitan local government reform. The only thing, therefore, that the Robson review looked at was metropolitan local government reform. The Robson review has come back and has been considered by the government, and the responses made by the Premier and the Minister for Local Government were about the Robson review. As was outlined today, the Robson review will now go to the Local Government Advisory Board and a process will start. There is still a long way to go. There is still an argument to be made about lines on the map. The member for Perth and the Minister for Local Government have spoken about some and I am sure there will be more. I believe, therefore, that the government is quite within its rights to go down this path. It is doing so and it does it with my support. The Robson review is a metropolitan-focused review and made recommendations on metropolitan local government reform. The government is following on with that review and made some decisions and announcements last week.

Country local government reform is not being considered by the government. Should the matter of country local government reform come to cabinet, a decision will be made. I am therefore very comfortable with the National Party's position on this matter. The National Party conference on the weekend reaffirmed again that we as the National Party are not supportive of forced local government amalgamations in regional Western Australia. That is the position our members hold, and if they had had the opportunity to speak in this debate today, that is what they would have said. They would have said that if Parliament were asked to vote on forced local government amalgamations, the Nationals would not hold that position. The bit that the opposition has never understood after nearly five years of an alliance government is that there are certain issues about which we have slightly differing opinions from the Liberal Party—not many; I think we have managed this arrangement, this partnership, in government very, very well

As Leader of the Nationals I will ensure that I always work within my role in government to deliver good outcomes for government and good outcomes for Western Australia. I support the Premier and the Minister for Local Government in this decision on metropolitan local government reform. I think it is an outcome that will deliver a benefit. If I did not think it would, I would not be supporting it. Should questions about country local government come up in the future, the Nationals will put our position at that point. I do not see that as any different from numerous issues that we had during the last term of government and probably more issues that we will have into the future. We believe that we can move forward on this. Again, it will be up to the Minister for Local Government to pursue that process. To me, this has been a good process in an alliance government of delivering on an agenda. That is exactly what we will do, and it will have my support.

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park)** [4.02 pm]: During his contribution the Premier said that we could have wimped it. The problem is that the Premier did wimp it. All these arguments being made by the Premier and the Minister for Local Government were not made prior to the election. In fact, the absolute opposite was said by the Premier in his glossy flyer and by the minister when he had to embarrass himself at the Armadale forum. That is the problem that they have. It is like being in two Parliaments. Most of the contribution from the Premier related to creating an outback council. Half of the member for Moore's electorate and half of the electorate of the member for North West are going into the outback council. I know that the member for North West is upset because his rates in Victoria Park are going to go up. He is going to lose the peninsula as a result of the Premier's decision. That is the reality. If the Premier is going to have courage and if he is going to beat his chest, he should say something before the election. There is nothing courageous about coming out three months after an election saying, "This is what we're going to do. We have the courage. We're going to make the tough decisions." Yet the Premier was like a church mouse prior to the election. Not only was he as quiet as a church mouse, but also he said the exact opposite of what he is saying now.

I will draw my friend the member for South Perth into this. I want to quote him. On 5 June this year he said, "I have always believed that the Premier has always thought the Burswood should go into the City of Perth. I think that he believes it always should have been in the City of Perth but what I'm saying is if that happens, well and good, but if it happens, there'll be no amalgamations on this side of the river. My message for the Lord Mayor is that she's going to have one big fight on her hands."

The member for South Perth, the member for Perth, the member for Belmont and the member for Swan Hills are all part of this mess. We will be running around their electorates letting them all know that they have signed up to this mess. I do not care that the Premier did not bring it to the party room to get his members' endorsement for this debacle. Post-election, suddenly he converted to the idea that we must now reform all local government despite the red tape reduction group being established and the report "Putting the Public First: Partnering with the Community and Business to Deliver Outcomes", which were not mentioned. When the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia polled all its members, two per cent of businesses said it was an issue. That is why we heard nothing from the government prior to the election. Now we have the weasel position—the cowardly position—and the perjury inflicted on the people of Western Australia post-election with

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the government suddenly saying that this is all it promised them before the election but it just did not tell them about it.

The member for Perth can send emails to the Mayor of Vincent and members opposite can have their separate differences, but if they vote for this, we will be holding them all to account for the position taken by the Premier. They cannot walk away from it because, as I am reading in the paper now, they are all crunching the numbers so that the Premier can move on before he is held to account in 2017.

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (17)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr R.H. Cook	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr D.A. Templeman ( <i>Teller</i> )
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms R. Saffioti	
Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Mr C.J. Tallentire	
Mr F.M. Logan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr P.B. Watson	

Noes (34)

Mr P. Abetz	Ms M.J. Davies	Mr C.D. Hatton	Mr D.C. Nalder
Mr F.A. Alban	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr A.P. Jacob	Mr J. Norberger
Mr C.J. Barnett	Ms W.M. Duncan	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr I.C. Blayney	Ms E. Evangel	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr I.M. Britza	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr R.S. Love	Mr M.H. Taylor
Mr T.R. Buswell	Mrs G.J. Godfrey	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr J.E. McGrath ( <i>Teller</i> )
Mr V.A. Catania	Dr K.D. Hames	Ms A.R. Mitchell	
Mr M.J. Cowper	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr N.W. Morton	

Pairs

Ms J. Farrer	Dr M.D. Nahan
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr R.F. Johnson
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr A. Krsticevic

Question thus negatived.