

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADVISORY BOARD — CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST PROVISIONS

665. Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN to the Minister for Local Government:

Before I ask my question, I acknowledge, on behalf of the member for Albany, Jess Bassett and her family who are in the Speaker's gallery. Jess is from Albany Senior High School, and is on her way to Hong Kong for the CLSA economic forum.

I refer to the Minister for Local Government's removal of the requirements for Local Government Advisory Board members to excuse themselves from deliberating on council amalgamations when they have a conflict of interest.

- (1) Did the minister seek any legal advice before instituting that change?
- (2) If yes to (1), what was that advice?
- (3) Given the chaos that has erupted following the government's removal of conflict-of-interest measures on the Environmental Protection Authority board, does this not imperil the whole amalgamation process?

Mr A.J. SIMPSON replied:

I thank the member for the question. I also take the opportunity to acknowledge the year 11 politics and law students from Carey Baptist College who are in the public gallery this afternoon.

- (1)–(3) The Local Government Advisory Board has gone through the whole process of the 43 proposals without there being a conflict of interest. Each member of that board has a deputy member, so they worked through the whole process without having a conflict of interest. The board wrote to me to ask me to seek State Solicitor's advice on whether we could remove that conflict of interest to come up with a final plan. Even now, while we are working through some other proposals, councillors or chief executive officers who are near or in that local government cannot sit in on the deliberations of their local government. But when the final jigsaw puzzle of the final report was put together, that is when we removed the conflict of interest so that the whole board could sit together and look at the bigger picture. I am confident, from legal advice I have, that I have done everything correctly. I have actually gone through the State Solicitor's Office to get this advice. In fact, every decision I have made in this reform process has been checked off by SSO.