

LOCAL GOVERNMENT - ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

31. Mr M.P. MURRAY to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

What alternative models could be used to help local governments deal better with the pressures arising from the assessment of development applications?

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN replied:

I thank the member for the question. It is very apposite. We all know that a whole raft of measures need to be taken as a result of the Corruption and Crime Commission inquiry. As the Premier has said, he intends to lead reform within the Labor Party, and we accept that that reform is necessary.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: The first three questions were heard in relative silence. They were very informative and interesting to the Western Australian public. We get to the fourth question and the wall of noise is re-instigated. It damages both this place and the answer.

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I apologise for having that impact on the opposition, causing an otherwise disciplined fighting force to turn into a complete rabble!

We know that we need to deal with the issues raised today in this Parliament. A number of us on both sides of the house have been discussing the need to look at proper training and induction for members of Parliament. This is one of the reforms that will be needed. It is also evident from the consequences of the terms of reference that many of the matters that have been investigated involve local government decision-making processes. It is quite clear that council members, who are volunteers, often find themselves under a substantial amount of pressure in dealing with development applications. This problem has been acknowledged around Australia. A national development assessment forum has been underway for a couple of years. It recently came up with a leading practice model for development assessment. It is advocating that policy setting and strategic planning remain with councils, but the executive act of assessing a development application against the policy set by the elected members needs another forum. The model that has been put in place in South Australia and some areas of New South Wales provides for such a framework. A panel comprised of specialist non-elected members chosen from the broader community, together with councillors who have undergone some training, can act to provide assessment of development applications.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I think all members are concerned that many local governments are struggling to find their way through the intense lobbying that they are often subjected to. Regrettably, yesterday, the shire president and two councillors in the Shire of Busselton resigned because they have been finding the stress difficult to deal with. There is a way forward. We now have an opportunity to develop and embrace the strategy that has been put in place elsewhere in Australia, and in New Zealand, and achieve some good for this state out of this very unfortunate process.