

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM - RECOMMENDATIONS

1208. Mr M.W. Trenorden to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development

I refer the Minister to the recent release of the recommendations for Local Government reform in Western Australia and I ask the following -

- (1) Does the Minister consider the amount of time allocated for the provision of these recommendations was adequate?
  - (a) if so, why?
- (2) Does the Minister consider the criteria provided on which these reforms would be based was adequate?
  - (a) if so, why?
- (3) Does the Minister consider the Local Government Act, currently in full force and effect in the State of Western Australia, adequately reflects the requirements of modern day, Western Australia regarding local government and its role within the communities it is answerable to?
  - (a) if so, why?
- (4) Is the Minister aware of the form of community servicing methodology on which the current Act is based?
  - (a) if so, what is it?
  - (b) if not, why not?
- (5) Would the Minister be surprised if he was advised that the current Act could be considered to be based on an archaic, empirical-colonial, city-centric administrative bureaucracy that -
  - (a) stifles initiative, innovation and self-sufficiency, especially in rural, regional and remote Western Australia;
  - (b) promotes costly duplication of services, especially in the Metropolitan Area;
  - (c) promotes a three-tiered system of administration creating a plethora of highly paid, “fat cat”, bureaucrats;
  - (d) does not assist in clearly delineating the roles and responsibilities of the Federal, State and Local Government agencies regarding many important funding responsibilities; and
  - (e) may well be directly responsible for the demise of many small towns in rural, regional and remote Western Australia?
- (6) Will the Minister consider a total revision of the current Local Government Act to include -
  - (a) a significant reduction in its unnecessary complexity and length;
  - (b) the provision of clearly quantified and qualified roles for the State and Local Government's regarding all matters relevant to the revised Act;
  - (c) an adequate and appropriate funding formula to allow for a more fair and equitable sharing of wealth between the State and the Local Government from which the wealth was sourced?
  - (d) if not, why not?
- (7) Will the Minister consider the creation of a single, unified Metropolitan Area Council to oversee all services currently provided by Local Government in this area to ensure there is no costly duplication of these services:
  - (a) if not, why not?
- (8) Will the Minister consider the creation of Regions of Councils, being totally responsible for overseeing all services currently provided by rural, regional and remote Local Government shires and councils to ensure there is no costly duplication of these services -
  - (a) if not, why not?
- (9) Is the Minister aware of the arguments that -
  - (a) rural, regional and remote WA suffers under a regime of “Taxation without Representation” created by this State Government;
  - (b) “Taxation without Representation” is immoral and could have serious future social and political ramifications for this State Government and the State;

- (c) Local Governments in rural, regional and remote areas of Western Australia that provide significant portions of this nation's wealth are among the poorest in the State;
  - (d) Local Governments in rural, regional and remote areas of WA have the fair and reasonable right to expect a just and equitable portion of the wealth generated by their area to be returned to their area;
  - (e) rural, regional and remote areas of Western Australia provide all the resources for the massive economic growth of this State;
  - (f) the Metropolitan Area is the major consumer of imported goods and services and is responsible for much of the debt this incurs; and
  - (g) this Government's continuous use of population demographics as the major economic rationale for necessary, new infrastructure development could well see the demise of some rural, regional and remote industries in Western Australia within ten to fifteen years?
- (10) Does the Minister consider his recent media statement "if people want to pay for the inefficiencies that are there in the Western Suburbs that's fine" is an appropriate statement for the Minister in charge of ensuring the quality, quantity and accountability of Local Government on behalf of both the ratepayers and taxpayers of this State?
- (11) Can the Minister accurately enumerate and define the actual, credible benefits to Local Government in this State that will emanate from this reform review -
- (a) if so, what are?
  - (b) what are they in order of importance and relevance?

Mr M.P. MURRAY:

- (1) The amount of time available to undertake the review and provide the recommendations was adequate for the Local Government Advisory Board, which sought and was granted an extension on the original reporting date.
  - (a) The Board has undertaken a comprehensive and well researched assessment of the position of local government in the State, reflecting a balance of detailed research and analysis and practical knowledge and understanding of local government.
- (2) The criteria used by the Local Government Advisory Board as the basis for the reforms was adequate.
  - (a) The Board has undertaken a thorough review and provided a well-considered and detailed report.
- (3) The Local Government Act provides powers of autonomy with additional provisions for accountability to the electors of each local government.
  - (a) A number of changes to the Act are being formulated to meet Government and community expectations on the role and performance of local government.
- (4) The current Act is based on the principle of autonomy for local government.
  - (a) Sections 1.3, 3.1, 3.5 and 3.18 of the Act reference the application of this principle.
  - (b) Not applicable
- (5) The Minister would be surprised to receive such an unbalanced assessment of the Act from a responsible advisor.
- (6) The Minister is receptive to suggestions to improve legislation and is prepared to consider review of legislation through a structured, planned and consultative process.
- (7) The creation of a single metropolitan area council is not supported.
  - (a) The Minister is not convinced that the creation of a single metropolitan area council is necessary or appropriate.
- (8) An extension to the role of regional councils in all parts of the State is supported, with benefits in minimising duplication and costs, but this needs to be driven from within the regions so that there can be sensitivity to the impacts of such changes on local communities.
  - (a) Not applicable
- (9) The Minister is aware of many statements and points of view related to the needs of rural, regional and remote Western Australia.

- (10) It is appropriate for the community to have a say in the future of their local government, and that they be fully informed to do so.
- (11) There are many potential benefits emanating from the reform review. These are outlined in detail in the Local Government Advisory Board's report, copies of which have been provided to members.