

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT — AMALGAMATIONS**

*Motion*

**MR J.N. HYDE (Perth)** [6.09 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the Barnett government —

- (1) to provide advice as to the cost of its flawed and failed amalgamation process to date, and the cost to both the state government and local governments; and
- (2) to rule out forced amalgamations of councils in Western Australia.

That includes all of Western Australia, not just the metropolitan area.

The previous Liberal government, with the current Premier and Ministers Day, Johnson and Moore in cabinet, turned two councils, Perth and Wanneroo, into six new ones. That was a 300 per cent increase in local government councils in Western Australia under that amazing Liberal Party government! That Liberal government cost ratepayers and WA families hundreds of millions of dollars as it spent money on four new palaces for the extra councils, new works depots and all the other duplications in costs. Now those same Liberal ministers are back and without any apology—no mea culpa—they want to spend hundreds of millions of dollars of local families' money to put all the councils back together again. They had higher rates and charges to create extra local councils in the 1990s and now they have higher rates and charges in the 2010s to create fewer councils. Make your mind up, Liberal Party! They should start telling the truth to the WA public.

This very weak Liberal government that we are stuck with set the terms of reference for the metropolitan local government review. In the draft findings released to the rest of us last Friday, the authors say that they are constrained by those terms of reference. Most telling is the recommendation that this government has to act quickly. Page 24 states —

Whatever the State government is to decide, it should do so as soon as possible, so that current projects are not delayed and opportunities missed ...

It also states —

Uncertainty about the future of Perth's local governments is a growing risk, as it is said to be affecting the ability of the sector to attract professional staff with the further risk of a loss of staff to private industry.

Page 9 of the draft finding states —

The current uncertainty about the future is a growing risk, as it is affecting the ability of the sector to attract professional staff ...

This is not anything new. This is something that the Western Australian Local Government Association and the local government sector have been telling the minister and the Barnett government for nearly four years. We need the Barnett government to tell the truth to the people of Western Australia about its real intentions and how much it will cost. Forced Liberal government carve-ups of councils cost hundreds of millions of dollars in the 1990s and forced Liberal amalgamations will cost hundreds of millions of dollars more from now on. Tell the truth.

This government is dedicated to inertia by stealth. The tag team of the Premier is huffing and puffing, "Watch out local government. We are going to blow your house down!" Then we have the Minister for Local Government mumbling, "Maybe this, maybe that. I know! I'll pretend I'm doing something by calling for public comment on a report into public comments the public has publicly commented on already." We cannot wait for the final report in June to filter through to cabinet and then for cabinet to shilly-shally on what it is going to announce. I urge the government to tell WA councils and ratepayers now what its intention is. The draft findings on page 17 tell us plainly —

... there is no consensus amongst the general public and local government sector on the ideal size for a metropolitan local government.

We all know that. Anybody who has ever been on a council or been elected to Parliament knows that. We do not need a very expensive report to tell us that. The minister today in question time was given the chance by the very able member for Collie–Preston to answer in detail how much the report cost and what the ongoing costs are, but the minister did not front up with the costs. Governments are elected to give certainty and vision. This government has procrastinated for four years. There is no consensus in the community, so the government should make its intentions and the true costs clear now.

The best estimates within the local government sector suggest that \$300 000 is spent every time metropolitan councils are required to respond to something from the state government. For example, the new government coming in; not having a set position; lobbying required; reports required; initial submissions when the Robson report inquiry was announced; submissions to the draft report. Now we are told that there may be a final report. The Robson report makes the coded warning on page 3 —

At this stage the Panel is not seeking general commentary on local government.

Will we have unending rounds of consultations and people being put through the wringer? The minister needs to be up-front about how many more rounds of alleged consultation we are really going to have.

If the minister is dinkum about cutting rate rises for local families, he should tell our 30 local councils what his position is. The minister knows—he has been in local government, as I have—that most of them are having meetings now to finalise their budgets. The minister has to be genuine with them in the planning of their budgets. Which councils will the minister abolish next month? Which councils will the minister abolish in spring? Which councils will the minister abolish at Christmas time? It would be very interesting to look at the minister's diary and see who he has been meeting with recently in potential commissioners for new local government and to see whether he has been meeting with anybody who may have been a commissioner before under a Liberal–National government.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** A very good commissioner, might I say.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I will come to the person the member is referring to later. He was an excellent commissioner and, of course, a visionary. I do not know who the minister has been meeting with, but I am referring, of course, to a former Minister for Local Government under a Liberal–National government who decided to split up councils. He was a visionary Minister for Local Government. He used some excellent funding mechanisms, but he was quite up-front about them. The current minister needs to also be up-front about his funding mechanisms for achieving this change. The minister's terms of reference have nobbled this committee. I cannot blame this panel for its recommendations. The minister has constrained it. The panel has been set forth on the government's agenda to deliver that answer for the government.

We have to know whether the minister is dinkum, in the rhetoric of the Barnett government, about cutting costs for local families. Why should our 30 metro councils individually have to spend money again on consultants and their staff to explain to the minister why recommendations and findings in this report, which have been formed from the minister's government's terms of reference, will not fly in WA? I am sure the minister as a former mayor already knows that some of the findings and recommendations just have no consideration with reality in local government in Western Australia.

**Mr A.P. Jacob:** Such as?

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** Has the member for Ocean Reef told his local council? Does he think that the Barnett government really wants one local government for all metropolitan Perth and Mandurah? How many members opposite believe that is a realistic outcome? The 30 metro councils and the 118 country councils are scared out of their wits about what the government will do about realistically creating one council if the Liberal Party is re-elected on 9 March. If the government really thinks that that is something that Western Australian councils, the community and economic analysis should be seriously looking at, it should tell us. The government should be honest and open. The government should tell us tonight whether it thinks we should be spending an awful lot of money on doing the economic analysis to prove to the government why one council in all of metro Perth and Mandurah will not work in WA. Let us look at the City of Brisbane, which the government cites as being the mega-council template for one council. That council is responsible for a lot of state government responsibilities. Does the Barnett government intend to hive off transport responsibilities to a greater Perth council? In Brisbane, that one council provides the CityCat and ferry services. There are 19 CityCats on the river and nine ferries, and 24 terminals—seven days a week, every 13 minutes, plus bus services running from 6.00 am to 11.30 pm across all of the Brisbane City Council area, as well as a free loop bus in the CBD. The Brisbane City Council installs and manages most traffic lights in Brisbane; currently, it operates 850 sets of traffic lights—installations and faults. Is the government's proposal for fewer councils—or even one—just another example of the Barnett government cost-shifting its responsibilities onto local government? If the government is dinkum about us considering Perth having one local government, then all those 30 local councils, every member of this Parliament, and anybody involved in budget estimates need to have information from the government so that we know what this one mega-council will do and where the money will come from.

Through this very narrow inquiry and his very defined, constraining terms of reference to this poor panel, the minister has focused on only 30 of the councils in Western Australia. As we all know, he has left alone more than 100 others, and it would be interesting to know why they have been left alone. This report was prepared by panel members who have not been members of Parliament or mayors in recent times; if their rationale and all the

examples that have been given are right for metropolitan councils, surely they are doubly right for regional councils. That is an issue that the minister has to come clean about with the Western Australian public.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** What are the three options in the report?

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I have been downloading the report and giving it to lots of people, because the minister did not table the report in Parliament. I should have tabled it myself, because that way bills and papers would have had it.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** It's open to everybody; every man and his dog can look at it.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I know: you, me, every man and his dog—we can download it. I have just had one of the minister's backbenchers ask me what is in it! Obviously there are hardworking members here who do not get out of the place; if the minister tabled the document in Parliament, they could go around the corner to bills and papers and get it. I hope that helps the member for North West; I was more gracious to him than his own minister! I hope he and his family remembers that when 9 March comes around!

In question time today, under severe sustained grilling by the member for Collie, the minister said that when he started as minister there were only 30 sustainable local governments in Western Australia. Could he please name them? He needs to explain exactly what it is he has done to make the 140-odd councils sustainable. What has he done about that, and what is he going to do about the Shire of Dumbleyung? I declare my interest there: not only is it in the electorate of the member for Wagin, but my excellent cousin is a councillor there, so I need to know whether he is going to be responsible for Shay Gap, or just Kukerin and Dumbleyung in the wonderful environs of the wheatbelt.

The minister also confessed today quite honestly that only two councils have amalgamated during the four years of the Barnett government, and he stated that he was attempting to achieve things, which would be laudable during the first six months as a minister, but four years in he needs to have more runs on the board. He said that 30 councils is ridiculous; he needs to be honest and tell the house his optimum number of councils. Every day that this drags on we are wasting money. For four years, local governments have been wasting time and money, losing staff and not having the best possible staff available because they do not know what the future of local government is in this state. It was quite telling that the minister said that having 30 local governments was ridiculous; was he criticising the visionary Minister for Local Government in the 1990s who bumped the number up to 30? He took the two councils of Perth and Wanneroo and created Joondalup, Wanneroo, Vincent, Cambridge, Victoria Park and Perth. Oomph—up to 30! Is the minister criticising what happened under that visionary minister? The minister needs to tell us why his cabinet colleagues created 30 councils in the 1990s. He has not provided any evidence to show why going to one council—or 15 or 10, whatever his magical number is—will miraculously improve quality of life in Western Australia and why it will bring down the cost of living for Western Australian families.

I believe that these draft findings show up the sloth and ineptitude of the government. It has not introduced the local government enterprises that are alluded to on page 23. It is a very important change to the operation of local government in this state, and it is something the minister should have done within his first six months. It has worked brilliantly in New Zealand. These are real examples of how we can get to an outcome of better quality of living for Western Australians, cheaper costs of living and more communities of interest. The answer is not the minister's magic change, change, change for its own sake; it is actually working with people.

Western Australia is a collaborative place; all the real change of great merit in Western Australia occurs through consensus. The Liberal government forcibly disamalgamated councils in the 1990s; now the minister is telling us that it did not work and was a mistake, and that it was horrendously wrong. He has not undertaken any meaningful work on the regional council process, which gets the same economic benefits from cooperation and shared services without the distraction of the rhetoric over forced amalgamation. We have both been mayors and have worked in local government; the minister knows that it is those emotional issues, those attachments to extraneous issues that become the deal breakers. The moment the minister removes the threat of forced amalgamation and says to a community, "We're not going to take away your heritage; we're not going to take away your history; we want to encourage you to change the way services are delivered," then he will get meaningful change.

When asked in a question on notice, the Premier referred back to the Western Australian Local Government Association's annual general meeting three years ago. He stated that the number of Western Australian councils needed to be cut from 139 to fewer than 100. He made that comment publicly, and I have asked him why he has not made significant inroads into meeting that target. If that is a target that has come from the Premier, did he pass it on to the minister? Did cabinet endorse it? We have only had two amalgamations. Will the Premier and the government list the councils that are to be cut or amalgamated to achieve this outcome? It is the detail that always matters, and that is what the Western Australian public is demanding from him today.

More importantly, the Premier needs to indicate the time line for achieving this outcome. If we really are going to go to fewer than 100 councils, then unfortunately, if we abolished all 30 of the metro councils, that would take us down to 108 councils. That would mean that eight regional councils at least are under threat. The Premier made the commitment three years ago, in front of every local government in Western Australia, that he would be working to cut the number of local governments to fewer than 100. Whatever way we look at it—the mathematics do not lie; the one thing that does not lie is mathematics—at least eight regional councils are under threat to meet the Premier’s commitment. The Premier needs to detail to us what those regional councils are. That is assuming that the 30 metro councils are cut to one. If the number of metro councils is cut to 15, that is another 23 regional councils in Western Australia that are under threat.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** Not while the Nationals are in power!

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** There is a bit of a fallacy about the Nationals being in power. If the reality is that the Nationals are wagging the tail of this dog, we need to be up-front about that.

The minister cannot have it both ways. In the minister’s tepid defence in question time today, he rattled off increased shared services among councils as one of his achievements. If that is an achievement—I happen to believe that getting councils to share services is a great achievement—and if that has made local government in Western Australia better, why not celebrate and encourage it more? How can the minister say we need to have massive change in the system, because the system is not working, when he is taking credit for things that he claimed has made it better? It is nonsensical. The minister cannot have it both ways. The Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority Act that we passed, and the existence of the previous redevelopment authorities, gave this government the chance to do the very things that the panel says on page 10 we need a new super council to do in terms of planning. If there really is the problem about having different planning regimes, then the minister has the legislation, and his government has the power, to create a redevelopment authority area anywhere in the metro area. So let us drill down to what the problem is, and, as with the creation of the East Perth, Subiaco, Armadale and Midland redevelopment authorities, address the problem.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** Can I ask you by way of interjection, if you do not mind, where I said in my answer today that I have increased shared services?

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** In the minister’s answer to the member for Collie–Preston?

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** Yes. Where did I say that? Just point it out to me. I am struggling to find it.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** What did the minister say?

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** No. You said that I said that I have increased shared services. What I want to know from you is where I actually said that, because you have obviously got it from somewhere.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I was in question time today and listening to the minister and taking notes.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** Where is it?

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I took notes of the minister saying that. So it is not shared services?

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I did not say shared services.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** So, under the minister, councils have not collaborated?

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** What?

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** So, under the minister, councils are not sharing any services in Western Australia? I thought the minister was taking credit in question time because councils were acting together cooperatively.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I just want to ensure that when you are quoting what I have said, it is accurate, because sometimes what you say is not quite accurate.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** Okay. Tell us. Did the minister say, or does he believe, that under his incredible leadership, local governments have been able to collaborate and share delivery of some services, programs and chief executive officers, or whatever?

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** What I said is that —

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** That is what I thought I heard.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** No. You thought wrong, because what I said, to answer the question of what I have done, is that I have been trying to increase the capacity of local government in asset management, strategic planning and financial management—those sorts of things. That is the thrust of what I was saying.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** Okay. So the minister has only been interested in them doing that singly, not together?

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** We cannot quote from the uncorrected *Hansard*, but I would suggest that the member look at the *Hansard* tomorrow.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** That is why I was relying on memory. Has the minister made any corrections?

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** Well, you shouldn't rely on your memory!

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson):** Members, I think we need to agree to disagree here and just get on with it.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I was giving the minister credit for having achieved a better outcome in local government, and he has taken me to task for giving him the credit for it!

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I don't think you ever give me credit for anything!

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** All right! We will turn the tack around. The minister has not done anything. The minister has not achieved any shared services, he has just confessed to us. I was giving the minister credit for great initiatives such as Canning council and some of the regional councils sharing accounting and other services.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I don't believe this!

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I was giving the minister credit for having worked towards super towns in this state, where councils in regional Western Australia are working together for economies of scale and to share services. I was giving the minister credit for all these things, but he does not want it!

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** Are you saying super towns is my initiative? Is that what you just said?

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I thought the minister was in cabinet! They do not tell him!

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I am sure that the member for Collie–Preston can help you out!

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I am sure that the National Party tail is wagging the dog, but the dog is not only asleep at the wheel; it is asleep at the cabinet table! There is now a host of Liberal Party candidates in regional Western Australia who are hearing from a cabinet minister that the Liberal Party wants to take no credit for super towns or any other initiative; it is all the National Party.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** What a pathetic thing to say!

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** It is, and the minister has just said it! Let us go to a record on *Hansard* that we can quote and we can talk about. Let us talk about 21 March 1996, when the Liberal Minister for Local Government was gloating about how wonderful the creation of these extra councils had been. The minister was a Mr Paul Omodei, who is known to many of us.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** A good local government minister too, by the way.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** He was an amazing local government minister. But the minister is trashing his record! The minister is saying he got it wrong. The minister is saying that by creating these 30 councils, he got it wrong, and he is going to tear it down. The minister cannot have it both ways. The minister cannot be having tete-a-tetes with him in here and taking suggestions for new commissioners as he abolishes councils —

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** He did a very good job in Cue, thank you.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I am sure he did a very good job as a commissioner, just as he did a great job as Minister for Local Government in sharing, in a wonderful socialist way, by taking money from people who had lots of money and giving it to other councils. Every council in Western Australia that has money in the bank, every council with a parking fund or a heritage fund, needs to know what the government's agenda is. The split up of the City of Perth and the City of Wanneroo was paid for out of the assets—nearly \$100 million, and more, when we add the costs that went there. There were some fine decisions within that socialist reallocation of money. The \$1 million for the Macedonian Hall in North Perth was very well appreciated in my electorate.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I am sure!

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** It was a fine decision by the Minister for Local Government back in 1996. We will come to that later.

So the minister was right. When Paul Omodei was in government, he was gloating—he was not afraid of his record, minister—about how wonderful the creation of these extra councils had been. In the debate on 21 March, he said —

The restructure of the former City of Perth has gone very well. Next week I will be going to the Town of Vincent to launch its emblem and also to open its first council meeting in its new offices.

I can confirm that the minister actually turned up and attended that meeting, as I was there.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** The City of Vincent has had some very good mayors, and it currently has some very good mayors, as you know, member for Perth.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** That is right. The mayor before me and the two after me were exceptional mayors.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I was not talking about you; I was talking about some since you.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** I will make exactly the same comment; the one before me was brilliant and the two after me were brilliant. I make no comment on the one in between.

The former minister said —

The Opposition has tried to beat the Government around the head in regard to the commissioners of the City of Perth.

He went on to say —

Everyone knows that when there is a restructure of a capital city, whether it is an amalgamation to make those cities bigger, as has occurred in the Eastern States, or a reduction in area, the normal procedure is that an Act of Parliament is passed and commissioners are put in place.

The current minister should be upfront with the people of Western Australia. When will the legislation be introduced? When will the commissioners be brought in? When will democracy be ended in local communities in metropolitan Perth? The minister needs to detail his time line to us. Will he tell Western Australians the truth or will he delay and prevaricate over pretend consultation and not make any changes before the state election?

Page 24 of the draft findings states that there are a vast range of implementation issues. The report states —

This includes the time frame for implementation, the costs of reform and how it will be funded. It is likely the greatest expenditure will be required in the earliest phases of implementation ...

I ask the minister: does this year's budget and the forward estimates factor in these costs? These terms of reference and the direction to the committee have exposed the flaws in the minister's proposal. Under "Benefits of reform" on page 11, it states that the City of Belmont, with 35 000 residents, raised \$16 million in commercial rates while Armadale, with 61 000 residents, could raise only \$4.5 million. The panel suggests that having one Perth council or larger councils would —

provide an opportunity for a more equitable spread of resources ... and equitable services for all residents.

I applaud the socialist sentiment here, but the Barnett government is promoting for local government the very sharing-of-rates income model that it has been complaining about with the GST carve-up. The minister cannot have it both ways. It is wrong at the federal level that WA gets duded and it is wrong at a local level that ratepayers in a unique community with unique needs should be subsidising another community's different aspirations 80 kilometres away. I think it is fine that people in Peppermint Grove want a level of personal service such that a garbo goes down to their backyard and picks up their rubbish bin. I think that is fine. I do not think my rates or the rates of somebody in Wanneroo should pay for it. What is the minister's view? Can he name the suburbs and the council areas that will pay higher rates and charges under a one-council model or a 10-council model? He should be upfront. Page 11 of the findings states —

The Panel is concerned that resistance to change will be greatest when thinking is clouded by self-interest ...

Welcome to the real world. Does the minister object to parents putting the needs of their families first? Is it wrong for local families to fight so that concrete batching plants do not operate in residential areas? That is self-interest. Is it wrong for local families to fight for traffic calming and on-street parking that slows traffic and brings customers to local shopping villages, rather than suffering from living on a freeway through inner city streets because this Liberal government will not invest enough in public transport? That is self-interest. No. Because of the minister's terms of reference, this panel says that if we do not create powerful mega councils with a monoculture single vision, we will all be doomed —

resulting in a disjointed, polluted and congested city suffering from sprawl.

The panel notes on page 9 that it —

has been surprised by the lack of an overarching community vision.

The government and the panel do not get it. Perth is a diverse metropolis. People in the inner city have different values from people in the outer suburbs. Greater Perth is a sprawling metropolis of some wonderful, amazing diverse villages, much like New York is today. I disagree strongly with the panel's criticism of diversity. It states —

At the moment there are 30 local governments in the Perth metropolitan region each with their own vision and goals for the future of *their* local communities.

I think this is a huge strength. On page 10 it argues —

Urban villages like Leederville, Subiaco and Mount Lawley will retain their character ... regardless of which local government is responsible for managing the locality.

It is wrong, wrong, wrong. It was only when the City of Vincent was run by the visionary Liberal Minister for Local Government that urban villages were able to develop because of community interest. Years of CBD and City Beach dominance of the old Perth city council had held back those of us in the urban inner city. As noted later in the report, we have a variation in heritage focus. The panel contradicts its own arguments. On page 12 it notes significant variation among the 30 councils and states —

Greater consistency on heritage provisions would benefit property owners ...

The minister should be hearing alarm bells. No, no, no. In heritage precincts such as Mt Lawley, we should have strong heritage planning laws and in industrial sections of Canning Vale, we should not.

I know that the member for Collie wanted to contribute to this debate. I am ready to pass the baton to the excellent member for Collie.

If we look further through this report, we find that it refers to the rationale for a super council in Perth to be able to provide leadership and vision. The panel and this government do not understand the former Liberal minister's visionary creation of a small City of Perth, where the interests of the CBD were not being swamped by people in City Beach or even in my own street in the inner city. We actually created a small council, the smallest capital city council in the world, that was able to concentrate on the big issues. It was able to put the interests of the CBD, which is the biggest employer of people and has the greatest concentration of retail and commerce in the state, first. Because we have a very small City of Perth, the current Lord Mayor is a much better and prominent tourism advocate than the Minister for Tourism. The current Lord Mayor, Lisa Scaffidi, has proven to be a greater advocate for international students than the education minister. Perth education organisations and other bodies want the Lord Mayor of Perth promoting Perth throughout Asia and around the world. The Lord Mayor is going to Houston for the oil-producing cities alliance, promoting the added value of us being a resource state. We need to look at the reality. When the former minister created a smaller City of Perth, he gave it the very scenario that the government's panel and its terms of reference think that a greater City of Brisbane, like the megalopolis created by Campbell Newman and my old mate Jim Soorley, would give. We have it already by having a small, dedicated CBD Perth city council. This has ramifications for regional WA. We know from the Premier's statement that regional WA councils are under threat. The minister has a lot of questions to answer and I hope that he will spend government time in Parliament telling us exactly what he will do, and that he will do it quickly.

**MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston)** [6.50 pm]: I will follow on from the lead I was given just then about regional areas. Certainly today's answers from the Minister for Local Government did not give me any faith that there will not be forced amalgamations in the future. The point I will make very early is that forcing two shires together will not make them far better. In some cases it could make them far worse. Regional people are very parochial about their districts and about what happens in them. I am sure that the minister would understand that if he stood at the top of Marlston Hill and looked across the hinterland at Dardanup, Capel, Harvey and those areas. They do not want to be amalgamated. They have their own views about what they want in their own communities, which is why they choose to live in them. It was disappointing in one way but pleasing in another to see that the members of the community of Capel came out in force to a public meeting recently because they wanted to put their points of view about what they want for the future of their shire. They need to keep their identity.

As we travel through country towns, especially in the wheatbelt areas, we can see that there are no longer the shires that used to be there. All that is left is a plaque that says there were once 3 000 people there but because the services were taken away, there is no longer a town there. The only evidence of people having lived there previously is a couple of old chimney stacks and a sign in the brown heritage colours. We do not want to see more of that in the regions; we want to see them grow and not be stifled by a decision about amalgamating councils. We want to see the regions and their councils grow. The people with jobs in the regions, whether they are CEOs, working on the rubbish trucks or doing general duties in the office, want to know where their jobs will go. They inherently disagree with the minister because they will lose their jobs. I have not seen anything about how those people will be looked after when the shires are amalgamated. Some country towns will absolutely collapse once the shires are amalgamated and their workers move to other areas.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** Will you take an interjection?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** They will collapse, and I am sure the member for North West will agree with me.

**Mr V.A. Catania:** I agree, but the country local government fund that we are providing is being used to grow regional towns and has made a huge difference. Do you support the Leader of the Opposition, who said that he believes the country local government money should be spent on roads instead of community projects?

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** As the member knows from when he was on our side of the fence, I have very strong personal views about everything and that sometimes I do not agree with every member whether they are on this side or that side. That view has helped to get me re-elected in a very marginal seat for many years. I would not be a rat and jump from one side to the other. I will just say what my view is. Remember one thing: it is our job to represent our people, and that is what I am doing today. The Minister for Local Government is based in Bunbury and is very focused on Bunbury. The City of Bunbury wants the amalgamations, and I can understand some of their reasons, which are not all bad. I can understand why the minister is hanging out there, but when I look around —

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I have never said to the Shires of Dardanup, Collie or Capel that they have to go with Bunbury. I have never said that. It is up to them if they want to.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The Premier has said that if they do not do it voluntarily, the government will change the funding agreements. Councillor Murray Scott from the Shire of Capel is very concerned about that. He has a very different view from the minister.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** I want you to quickly acknowledge that I have never told them who to go with or what to do. The member for Collie–Preston knows me well.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** I take the point. The pressure is being put on them. Regional meetings were held and Bunbury is in the middle with nowhere else to grow. It is quite obvious what will happen if the government forces councils to amalgamate. It is about funding the central body. That means that funding will go to the central council but things will not be done. Who knows which roads need work done and what services and facilities are needed better than the people who live in towns such as Dardanup, Collie and Capel? They know what they want, and they want their services. They do not want to lose their identity.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** What do you think about Mayor David Smith's comments? He said that he was willing to cede power to the councils outside Bunbury and that out of the 12 votes, he would give them seven votes so that Bunbury would have five votes and all the power would come from outside of Bunbury. They could tell Bunbury what to do. What do you think about that situation? They said no. You tell me.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** The only very good thing to come out of this is the shared services and the work that has been done in those areas. The minister cannot say that nothing is happening because the councils are working together, whether or not the minister wants them to. Some outer shires—certainly not in the inner areas around Bunbury—share graders and rollers. Capital expenditure of \$300 000 to \$500 000 is now being shared across the board. That is what I would like to see more of, but do not take away the identity of these people. Do not take away the heart and soul of some of these smaller towns. That is what will happen if they are pushed into amalgamation. It is amazing to think that Katanning—I spoke to that council the other day—is saying it wants amalgamations to occur but it wants everyone to come to it because it says that it is the biggest town with 4 000 people. Katanning wants Dumbleyung, Kent, Gnowangerup, Broome Hill, Kojonup and Woodanilling to be part of its greater shire. What about the people on the extremities? The minister knows how bad it is for Bunbury to be so far from the city. We know there are problems with the extremities. Why would the minister allow and encourage that so that people on the far edges of the council would have to travel 50 or 60 kilometres into town to see someone over the counter at their council so they could argue that their bill or rates is incorrect?

**Mr G.M. Castrilli** interjected.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Is the minister saying that mobile vans will travel around the state and pick up these problems? That is not efficient. The way to get efficiencies is by working together and working to a plan. The minister has pushed that line, and I will give him credit for that. Some royalties for regions funding cannot be accessed unless it is shared across shire boundaries, and I applaud that, but I do not want to see the overall picture change so that people in those communities cannot walk up to the counter at their council and ask someone to do a job or let someone know that there is a problem with a culvert down the road because the office is 50 kays away. That will cost money because inspectors will have to drive to the roads to see whether they need grading and edging. All those things in country towns are done by the local people reporting it to the local council. That will cost money. I do not see how being big is great.

The whole thing is about identity. When country people are asked where they come from, they will puff up their chest and say Bunbury or Capel or Dardanup. That is what it is about. Do not take away that identity. People look to Bunbury as a centre but let the other councils make their own decisions. This is about decision making, and



the government is taking that away. Where will the councillors come from? Will we go back to the ward system again? I do not know because I have not seen that proposal. If five councils amalgamate, will there be one councillor from here and one from there? The balance will not work out. It will not be a true vote because the numbers will be in the city in the middle of the town and the people on the extremities will miss out. Where will Collie be put? I am not trying to be biased towards Collie but does Collie look to Wagin or to Darkan or to Arthur River? There are about 800 people in Arthur River, but Collie is in timber country and looks to Bunbury for many of its services, including educational services such as training and jobs. Collie does not look to Darkan, so why should Collie be forced to amalgamate with a smaller council? That would be a burden on what I believe is a quite well-run council as far as its finances go. The Shire of Harvey is adamant that it does not want to amalgamate. Michael Parker, who was on one of the early groups for amalgamation—I thought the minister made a mistake yesterday when he said that Michael Parker was pro-amalgamation—stood up for his community in the end. That is what I like to see.

**Mr G.M. Castrilli:** Two per cent of the Harvey community voted no. Even though the paper said it was 80 per cent, it was 80 of the respondents of 559 or whatever. It was two per cent of the population.

**Mr M.P. MURRAY:** Why, as the minister, is the member not following what the communities want? That is the real crux of the matter. If the minister allowed people a free vote, he would find that not one shire would vote to amalgamate.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

---