



Speech by
Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard Wednesday, 16 April 2008

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1):
DISALLOWANCE**

Mr ELMES (Noosa—Lib) (8.28 pm): I rise to contribute to tonight's disallowance motion concerning the ability of the former Aramac Shire Council to pay its workers. From the outset let me say that I am not surprised that, nearly one month after the Labor government's belligerent campaign against local government in Queensland, we are still here trying to clean up its mess. I note the irony that in this House today the Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry said that the greatest challenge to regional Queensland is the shortage of labour. Obviously the minister and the Deputy Premier need to have a conversation—not with Queensland but with regional Queensland. May I suggest that the Deputy Premier listen to his colleagues about the issue of regional workers.

The Bligh government is in disarray over its response to labour market pressures. Two ministers from the same government are blatantly contradicting each other. Labour shortages in regional Queensland are crippling, particularly in areas like Aramac and the now Barcaldine Regional Council, and that is why Aramac needed to pay their workers above-award rates. Many regional centres are seeing massive movements of their workers into the mining sector and, as a result, employers and councils must pay more to keep their workers. With the old boundaries of the Aramac shire just a stone's throw from the lucrative mines of the Bowen Basin, the threat of more labour shortages has caused their neighbouring shire councils to increase the rates of pay to between 108 per cent and 115 per cent of the award rate. The simple truth behind this is that people are drawn to jobs. They are drawn to pay. The Aramac Shire Council was doing what it could to keep up.

This is simple economics. Given Minister Boyle's comments in this place only today, one would expect that the government would understand the position of the former Aramac Shire Council. Unfortunately, the Bligh government has disappointed the people of Queensland, particularly the people of regional Queensland, yet again.

This government does not understand what regional life is like, just as it does not understand what it is like to live in small country towns that are under threat because of population decreases. But the real effect of its actions just makes life harder for councils in regional Queensland and their employees. We probably should not be surprised that this government does not understand western Queensland given that the Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland comes from Toowoomba.

I would like to give a very simple explanation of the cost of living in regional Queensland and paint a very simple picture. According to the 2006 census, the median weekly wage in the Aramac shire was \$417. I would like to see how many people in this House would like to live on \$417 a week. But in the mining town of Emerald, just a couple of hours down the road, the median weekly wage was \$694. That is more than half again just for driving down the road a little way, as we would say in the bush, and getting a job in the mines.

In Moranbah, another mining town about three hours away, the median weekly wage rose to \$948. That is nearly twice what people get living in Aramac. That is great for the people of Moranbah, but it makes it incredibly difficult for employers in Aramac to keep their workers. In Dysart and Middlemount the

median weekly wages were \$932 and \$1,076 respectively. That is in contrast to Jericho, where the council workers already receive a 15 per cent premium. The median wage per week was \$439.

This shows the disparity between regional towns in western Queensland and explains why these smaller regional towns are struggling to hang on to their young people. As I said, a simple look at the 2006 census information should have shown the range of premiers and ministers involved in forced council amalgamations—I include Premiers Beattie and Bligh and ministers Fraser, Pitt and Lucas—that a very small increase in council wages for those in the Aramac shire was just plain common sense. Eight per cent on \$417 a week is not going to break anyone's bank.

In Aramac, as compared to the mining town of Moranbah, proportionately speaking there are about 66 per cent fewer people aged 15 to 24. The future of these regional towns lies in their young people. Frankly, the young people are leaving. I know that the Bligh government does not realise the problem. If too many young people leave these towns it puts in serious doubt their ongoing viability. Unless checked, we may see everywhere west of the Bogantungan Range turned into a waste land.

Mr Hoolihan interjected.

Mr ELMES: I understood and pronounced it very well, member for Keppel. I strongly support the disallowance motion.