

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMALGAMATIONS — NATIONAL PARTY POLICY

549. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Leader of the National Party:

My question relates to National Party policy. I refer to reports yesterday that the Minister for Local Government intends to seek cabinet approval to legislate to force local government amalgamations, and to reports today that country members of the Liberal Party oppose their minister and the Premier on this matter.

- (1) Will the Leader of the National Party join with the WA Labor Party to vote against any legislation that will force local government amalgamations?
- (2) Will the Leader of the National Party join with the WA Labor Party to oppose any moves by the Liberal Party to force amalgamations by means other than legislation, including local government boundary changes?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS replied:

- (1)–(2) In the spirit of bipartisanship that the member for Warnbro asks for, will he agree with me today that the local government fund is a vital way —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Perhaps the Leader of the National Party might answer the question if the opportunity is provided.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I just said that given the kumbaya being wished for by the member opposite, today we were very excited to sign off the financial assistance agreement with the Shire of Murray on this year's allocation of the local government fund. A component of that money will go towards the shire's new aquatic centre. The question is still being asked of me by the Shire of Murray about what the opposition is going to do with the local government fund since it has criticised it and denigrated it every step of the way. As the opposition spokesperson on this, does the member for Warnbro have a policy position on the local government fund?

Several members interjected.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I did not think the member for Warnbro would actually have a policy position!

The question the member for Warnbro put to me today relates to a report tabled last week by the Minister for Local Government. I have seen that report. It deals with structural reform of the local government sector. I think everyone in the chamber agrees that local government reform is important. We have certainly supported that through the local government fund, with 35 per cent of this year's allocation going to regional groupings of local governments. That has led to very good cooperation at the regional level across all local governments. We look forward to detailing to the Parliament the projects that occur from that.

Again, the National Party has a clear point of view on this matter. We do not support forced amalgamations. We know the opposition does, but it stopped supporting it to play politics in this term, which is a lot like what it did on trading hours. The Labor Party has had two positions on trading hours and two positions on local government reform. When we talk about uranium mining, members opposite go quiet and do not want to say a thing! It will not have an opinion on uranium mining! I suggest, as someone who sat on the opposition benches for eight years, that it takes a while to understand what one's job is in opposition. I suggest to the member for Warnbro that he would be far better coming up with some policy positions and sticking to them because he believes in them rather than because he thinks they are a wedge. Although he might think this is a great wedge issue, it is not. I support the Minister for Local Government in trying to drive local government reform. The minister has a view; I have a view. Everyone has a view on the best way to achieve this. We make that point very clearly.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, I formally call you for the first time today.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Is that all?

The SPEAKER: "Is that all?"—yes. I thought you might have silenced yourself after a while, member for Mandurah. You did not. I call you for the first time. Minister, I hope you are going to keep it brief.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I conclude by saying that I have worked very closely with the Minister for Local Government on the local government fund. Into the out years, that fund becomes a 100 per cent regionally focused fund. The Minister for Local Government and I are very clear that that level of incentive for local governments to work together will deliver very positive reform for the sector. That is about real action to deliver local government reform rather than what the opposition constantly talks about.