

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMALGAMATIONS —
REGIONAL TRANSITION AND REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE GROUPS

39. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Minister for Local Government:

I refer to the minister's statement on ABC regional radio on 29 January that his latest proposal for regional transition groups and regional collaborative groups is the last hurrah for the government.

- (1) What is the total amount of taxpayers' money that the minister's department has spent on the amalgamation process to date?
- (2) What is the total amount of ratepayers' money that councils around the state have spent on the minister's amalgamation process to date?
- (3) Does the "last hurrah" mean he will abandon his structural reform process if regional transition and collaborative groups are overwhelmingly rejected by local governments across WA?

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI replied:

I thank the member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(3) Firstly, in relation to the costs, we entered into a voluntary process that we believe will have absolute benefits for the state of Western Australia and for communities. By inviting local governments to do that, we have assisted them in completing submissions as part of that reform by engaging ongoing consultants and consulting their communities. We conducted workshops around the state. The information that has been given to me and the costs to date are as follows. A total of \$710 941 has been allocated to country local governments to assist them with their reform submissions. A total of \$288 198 has been allocated to metropolitan local governments to assist them with their reform submissions. The cost of workshops is about \$54 000. The costs associated with bringing over senior Queensland officers to speak about the process of reform in Queensland is estimated at about \$4 000. The department undertook some independent research, which cost \$18 091.60. I have also committed \$50 000 as a contribution to a project officer for the Mingenew amalgamation group. That has not been paid yet. Travel costs associated with the current round of engagements stand at about \$2 720. That process is ongoing, and not all costs have come in yet.

As to the member's question of what it costs local governments, I do not have that figure. That is something the member may want to ask each individual local government. Individual local governments are autonomous bodies. The member may want to consult them and ask them about it.

This government believes that the just over \$1 million we have expended to date is an absolutely great investment for the future of this state and for the future of communities. It is an investment in this state. Local governments have said to me that the money the government has given them to do their benchmarking has been absolutely invaluable because they have been able to look at the processes that they might be able to improve upon. That has been a great investment so far.

As to the "last hurrah", the last hurrah is the process I am engaged in right now: the regional transition group models and the regional collaborative group models. I am very confident that a lot of local governments will take them on board. They need to report to me giving an indication by 26 March, as the member well knows because he was there on that famous Tuesday and listened to what I had to say when I was on my feet for 80 minutes and answered about 54 questions. I think everybody got their fair share, and I think even the member for Warnbro now understands what the process is all about. The government is in the middle of a reform process in this state. The opposition knows it is the right thing to do; the local government industry knows it is the right thing to do; and the previous Labor government, through its local government advisory board, knew it was the right thing to do. Do members opposite know who is the absolute champion of reform? The federal Labor government is the absolute champion of reform, and it has said to me, "For God's sake, don't blink; keep going." I welcome the support of federal Labor. At least this side of the house has had the guts to put the elephant in the room that has been talked about for the past 40 years or more.