

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMALGAMATIONS

**353. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Minister for Regional Government:**

I refer to leaks from cabinet revealing splits on the government's council amalgamation process.

Is it National Party policy to support —

- (a) forced local government amalgamations;
- (b) fewer than 100 local governments across Western Australia; and
- (c) the position that wheatbelt councils representing fewer than 2 000 people are unsustainable and should be forced to amalgamate?

**Mr B.J. GRYLLS replied:**

I thank the member for the question. I am very interested in his taking the high moral ground on policy given what occurred yesterday with Labor's disgraceful decision to abandon the small business sector, which until now it has supported—but no longer. That is what we know about the member for Warnbro's policies. Unfortunately, for the good people of the Wheatbelt, when it comes to local government, anything that members opposite say cannot be taken as the truth. They cannot trust members opposite because they have exhibited very clearly that they cannot tell the difference between diesel and unleaded petrol but they cannot hold the line on policy—yet here they are today asking me a question about local government reform.

The National Party has always been very clear on its policy on local government reform. We do not support compulsory amalgamation of local government. But what we do and what we are exhibiting by action rather than words is support for local government through the country local government fund, a \$100 million injection in the financial year 2008–09, \$10 million of planning money in the last financial year and a further \$100 million injection into local government in the 2010–11 finance year. That is a \$210 million support package for local government, member for Warnbro. I give the member the opportunity now to say, should he become a minister some time in the distant future, whether he will continue that.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Do you believe councils —

**Mr B.J. GRYLLS:** No; I asked a question. Will he continue the local government fund?

Several members interjected.

**Mr B.J. GRYLLS:** Of course he will not. There is a \$210 million package to support infrastructure in regional councils. This year, importantly, a real constructive way of encouraging local governments to work together has been implemented through 35 per cent of that fund being allocated to groupings of local governments so they can come together to plan projects and bring those projects to fruition. Off the back of that cooperation around projects we expect to see more cooperation among the sector, and that is already being exhibited. That will go a long way to delivering reform of the local government sector.

The five local governments of the Peel region, for example, have worked closely with the Peel Development Commission, and they have prioritised one major infrastructure project for those five councils into the out years of the country local government fund. We get reform of the local government sector by working closely with them, providing incentives and making sure their infrastructure needs can be met. In close cooperation with the Minister for Local Government, we have put together the capacity-building programs for local government. We have worked closely with the sector through the local government fund to deliver the capacity to do much better. As I said at the outset, the policy position of the member for Warnbro can never be taken as genuine because his party will backflip as soon as it gets into government.