

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT — REFORM**

*Statement*

**HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan)** [6.17 pm]: I want to take a short moment to thank the Minister for Local Government for the response he provided to one of my questions last week—specifically, how much notice the Western Australian Local Government Association and local government CEOs had about the imposition of a quota system for this coming week’s local government elections. My question was focused, but the answer was perhaps less so. As members will be aware, WA will go to the polls this weekend. We have known since we debated the Local Government Amendment Bill that we would be looking at a new system of optional preferential voting. It was not made clear that the new system would come with a quota element firmly attached to it. The minister asked me to refer to *Hansard*. I searched, but I could not find any mention of a quota. There was zero mention of a quota.

The next part of the answer was that I ought to read between the lines. I found that very unhelpful. If we have to read between the lines when looking at the legislation that comes through our chamber, it has not been formulated quite as clearly as it ought to have been. I find it troublesome that we need to read it with even more care than we already do.

It was not just me. I have consulted with a number of CEOs on this topic, some of whom very vociferously said that they were blindsided by this. Is it a bad thing? Okay. They learnt about this only a short while ago. I will be voting in the Fremantle council election soon, so I looked at how it has arranged for the election to be run. It is very complicated. The CEO of one of the larger councils has said that they were completely blindsided and it has 13 candidates for three vacancies.

The worrying thing was that it was said that the last time this was tried at a local government level was in 2007. I am told that on that occasion it was a dog’s dinner. It was completely chaotic. Someone said that it turned that election into a total and utter schemozzle. If members here had been aware that an imposition of quotas was on the cards, but only in some circumstances because it is not every time that a quota is employed as it depends very much on how many vacancies there are, we would not have dissuaded the government I am sure, but we at least would have been able to find the word “quota” in *Hansard*. What will the practicalities be, because it is happening this weekend? I am told that it might take as long as a week for the results to be made available. It used to take a day. It is almost as if the plan is to turn the local government election process into something as lengthy as the Legislative Council elections. How many weeks will it take for the final numbers to be determined? I am not satisfied that a complete answer has been given, but I will give notice to anyone who is interested that I am going to do what I can to find out exactly what the effects will be. The Western Australian Local Government Association and even the Local Government Elected Members Association might have raised some questions with the minister, but I will see what I can find out as a result of this coming election.

Also of note is the fact that I asked for more information, a summary of the correspondence, that was not provided. I wonder whether there was any correspondence and has it just been hidden. I will have to make up my own mind. I have some sympathy for the minister. He took on this portfolio at fairly short notice and someone has described it as an unexploded hand grenade. Maybe things will work perfectly. I do not know but we will find out this weekend. I will be watching for the explosion of the hand grenade over the weekend and putting that back to the house if there are any unintended consequences of what was well-meaning, well-intended legislation. I am basically saying to the chamber that I will be watching the local government election rather than taking time out on the golf course this weekend, and I hope that all members wish me well.