

Minister for Local Government

Jim Cox

Local Government Amendment (Local
Government Board) Bill 2009

Second Reading Speech

I move – That the Bill now be read for the second time.

Mr Speaker, this Bill seeks to implement important changes to the role and structure of the Local Government Board.

The Local Government Board is an independent body established under the *Local Government Act 1993*. Its role has been, and will continue to be, to contribute to a sound and progressive local government sector and to report to the Minister of the day.

During the review of the Local Government Act in 2003 and 2004, it was agreed that a separate review of the Board should be undertaken.

This review began in 2006 under the auspices of the Premier's Local Government Council. These amendments have arisen from the outcomes of that review.

The review was overseen by a steering committee representing the local government sector, the State Government and the community.

The steering committee recommended that the Local Government Board should play a more strategic role within the state's local government sector.

Through this Bill, the Government will re-focus the Board's work, modifying its structure, increasing its flexibility and enabling it to be more expertise-based.

The Board's first cycle of general reviews of all councils was completed in 2007.

Whilst these reviews have made an important contribution to the improved performance of local government during the past decade, the Bill removes the mandatory requirement to conduct a general review of each council every eight years.

This reform will lead to a more targeted and strategic approach towards local government review and reform.

The new provisions will enable the Board to focus on more strategic issues whilst retaining the ability to review individual councils where considered necessary.

The Minister of the day will retain the power to require the Board to carry out a review of an individual council.

In addition to the general reviews of all councils, the Board has completed 15 specific reviews since its inception.

In future, more strategic specific reviews will become the priority of the Board.

Individual councils retain the ability to request a specific review on a range of issues, such as a possible reduction in councillor numbers. The ability for electors to seek such a review through a petition is also retained.

This Bill reduces the size of the standing Board from five members to four, and creates two new positions for specialist members who may be appointed on a review-by-review basis.

This achieves a better balance of local government experience and expertise, ensuring that the Board and its activities will be well-informed and focused on the issues at hand in each individual review.

The costs of the Local Government Board will continue to be met by the State Government.

Overall, the amendments contained in this Bill will enable the Board to function more effectively within a broader framework that promotes continuous improvement in council governance, reporting and overall performance.

This Bill is the result of extensive consultation, particularly through the Premier's Local Government Council, and has the support of the local government sector in this State.

The State Government is committed to working with local government to improve council sustainability and governance.

These amendments are an important part of that joint effort to achieve ongoing improvements in local government performance.

I commend the Bill to the House.