

SECOND READING SPEECH

Local Government Amendment (Mayoral Candidate Eligibility) Bill 2014

Peter Gutwein MP
Minister for Planning and Local Government

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

Madam Speaker

This Bill is a step towards reducing unnecessary rules and restrictions that hamper local government.

Local government is responsible for a wide range of services and the decisions made by elected officials have a significant impact on local communities and Tasmania as a whole.

To drive Tasmania forward by building a stronger economy and stronger communities, we should open up the democratic process.

Currently, a person is only eligible to nominate as a candidate for the office of mayor or deputy mayor if the person has had at least 12 months experience as a councillor.

Concern regarding this eligibility requirement has been raised previously within the local government sector and the restriction will now have greater impact as 2014 heralds the introduction of key changes to local government elections. Namely, mayors and deputy mayors being voted in for four-year terms rather than the previous two-year terms and the new four yearly all-in, all-out local government elections.

To keep the eligibility requirement as is, would effectively mean that most people would need to be a councillor for four years, before being eligible to nominate as a candidate for the office of mayor or deputy mayor.

It is unnecessary, counterproductive and undemocratic that potential candidates for these leadership roles are prevented from nominating for election by an eligibility restriction that does not apply to any state or Federal jurisdiction.

The government believes there are talented, experienced people who, if they chose to run and were elected, could serve their council and community well.

This Bill removes this eligibility requirement and allows candidates to run for the office of mayor or deputy mayor, provided they are eligible to run for the office of councillor.

The positions of mayor and deputy mayor are crucial to local communities, and it should be the community that decides who should get elected.

Local Government supports the Bill. At the Local Government Association of Tasmania 2014 General Meeting, a motion to request the Tasmanian Government to remove this eligibility requirement was successful, with the majority of local government agreeing that this restriction is unnecessary.

I consider a strong, well governed, democratic local government is essential to the rebuilding of the Tasmanian economy and I want to ensure that the legislative framework that governs local government facilitates its success. This Bill provides opportunity; it broadens choice and is an important step in that direction.

I commend the Bill to the House.