



Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Assembly, 5 May 2011, Proof)

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Thursday, 5 May 2011 (Proof).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (SHELLHARBOUR AND WOLLONGONG ELECTIONS) BILL 2011

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Donald Page.

Agreement in Principle

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast) [3.55 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

In 2008 Wollongong City Council was dismissed following a recommendation by the Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC], which identified systemic issues and a culture of corruption that needed to be fixed. Only a few hours ago a former Labor councillor on Wollongong City Council, Frank Gigliotti, was sent to gaol for lying to the ICAC. The actions of councillors and members of staff such as him stained not only the reputation of Wollongong City Council but also the reputation of the Illawarra area. Shellharbour City Council also was dismissed in 2008 after a public inquiry found that Shellharbour council was dysfunctional. The previous Labor Government decided both councils were to remain under administration until September 2012. This Government wants to return democracy to the people in the Wollongong and Shellharbour local government areas. This Government made a commitment that both Wollongong and Shellharbour councils would have democratically elected councils in place in 2011. This Government fulfils its promises and the council elections will take place on 3 September 2011.

In reaching this decision, the New South Wales Liberals-Nationals Government has listened to the community. I have listened to the newly elected members for the electorates of Kiama, Gareth Ward, and Heathcote, Lee Evans, who campaigned strongly on this issue. In Heathcote Lee Evans had a swing to him of 21.7 per cent and in Kiama Gareth Ward had a swing of 19.4 per cent. The swing against the Labor member for Wollongong was 24.3 per cent. I believe that the community is looking forward to being able to elect their own councillors once again.

The Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Bill will ensure that fresh elections for both councils are held on 3 September of this year. The bill will make sure that the ratepayers of both councils are not faced with the cost of another council election within 12 months. It provides for a one-off, five-year term for both councils, saving Wollongong City Council an estimated amount of \$943,000 and Shellharbour City Council an estimated amount of \$307,000. The next local government elections for these councils after 2011 will be in September 2016. This will bring these two councils back into line with the local government elections cycle for the rest of the State.

The bill also addresses concerns raised in the Shellharbour public inquiry report about the structure of Shellharbour City Council. The commissioner found that the current structure of Shellharbour City Council contributed to its dysfunction. The report highlighted the problems in retaining a ward structure for the council. The size of the Shellharbour local government area makes Shellharbour City Council more suited to having no wards. Shellharbour is relatively small in size, about 147 square kilometres, with a population of approximately 65,000. This bill abolishes wards for Shellharbour City Council in time for the fresh elections on 3 September 2011. This removes the need for a constitutional referendum to be held to abolish all wards, the result of which would not have come into effect until 2016. Shellharbour is about 100 square kilometres smaller than its neighbouring council area, Kiama, which also has no wards. Former Labor Mayor Hamilton of Shellharbour City Council gave evidence to the public inquiry stating that the maintenance of the ward boundaries was problematic. The bill also reduces the number of councillors on Shellharbour City Council to seven. By doing so, it addresses another factor identified by the Shellharbour public inquiry as contributing to the dysfunction of the council.

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Former Mayor Hamilton also stated at the public inquiry that he held a personal view that a reduction in councillor numbers to six and a mayor would be a good option. He gave evidence that he believed it would lead to better governance and save money. He further stated:

... councillors would still be able to represent the residents at a high level.

In a submission to the public inquiry the council itself also acknowledged the advantages of reducing councillor numbers. The abolition of wards and the reduction of councillor numbers to seven will mean that the method of electing councillors will change from optional preferential to proportional representation with a quota of 12.5 per cent plus one for a councillor to be elected.

Currently, the system for counting votes in a contested election for a ward or undivided area is to be optional preferential if the number of councillors to be elected is one or two, or proportional if the number to be elected is three or more. The proportional voting system is generally used across all levels of government in multi-member electorates because it is designed to allocate seats or offices in proportion to the overall number of votes obtained by the candidates. The abolition of wards in the Shellharbour local government area will lead to a lower quota, which is expected to encourage more people to stand for office and, therefore, enhance the democratic process.

The bill also changes the method of election for the mayor at Shellharbour City Council. The mayor is now to be elected by the councillors every 12 months from one of their number. The bill therefore provides for all of these important changes to be in place in time for the fresh elections on 3 September 2011. This will enable the newly elected council to start afresh without having to incur the costs of conducting constitutional referenda to make these changes to its governance structure. If in the future the council wants to divide itself into wards, alter its councillor numbers or change the manner in which its mayor is elected, it will be able to do so.

In relation to Wollongong City Council, in 2008, following the Independent Commission Against Corruption Operation Atlas hearing, ratepayers' satisfaction with Wollongong council was at an all-time low. However, a recent administrator's report noted that public confidence in council had improved markedly due to actions taken by the administrators, including restoring the reputation of Wollongong City Council; maintaining a corruption-resistant organisation with zero tolerance of corruption; introducing contemporary local environmental planning controls and more efficient processes for assessment applications; effective corporate governance and leadership; and diligent management of council finances, including budgeting and control.

The bill requires the administrators of Wollongong City Council to reduce the number of wards for the council from six to three by 24 June 2011. This will mean that the council will have three wards with four councillors per ward and a mayor who is elected by all of the electors—a popularly elected mayor. This reflects the geographical size and population of Wollongong. The population is almost 200,000 people and it has an area of 684 square kilometres comprising a long coastal area stretching from the Royal National Park to Lake Illawarra. It is the third largest city in New South Wales and the ninth largest city in Australia. Its central business district is a major commercial hub.

The bill allows for this reduction in the number of wards to happen within a short period of time. This is because all ward boundaries need to be finalised by 24 June 2011 in order for the New South Wales Electoral Commissioner to do the work required to conduct elections on 3 September 2011. This change in ward structure will mean that the method of electing councillors for each ward will change from optional preferential to proportional representation. This is the method used in most council areas in New South Wales and it will allow greater diversity and representation. As in the case of the changes to Shellharbour City Council, the bill preserves Wollongong City Council's ability to make future changes to the number of its wards should its community so desire. I conclude with a quote from the editorial in the *Illawarra Mercury* today:

We need fresh, energetic local Government leaders. We need new faces, new voices and new ideas.

The councils' time under administration has allowed us to put some distance between the present and the sorry and sordid past of the corruption in Wollongong and dysfunctionality in Shellharbour. Now, we need to keep walking.

The provisions of this bill will allow new faces, voices and ideas for the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour in their local government areas because it will allow fresh, energetic local leaders to have a chance to become an elected representative. The Liberal-Nationals Government will help the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour to keep walking away from the sorry and sordid past of corruption and dysfunctionality. We have returned democracy to Wollongong and Shellharbour. We have kept our promise. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs BARBARA PERRY (Auburn) [4.04 p.m.]: I speak on the Local Government (Shellharbour and

Wollongong Elections) Bill 2011. The behaviour of the Government at this point is of great concern to me and it should be of great concern to the whole Parliament, particularly this side of the House. Twice in two days we have seen this Government show its arrogance towards this Parliament and the procedures. Some bills were introduced yesterday and I do not know why this bill was not introduced and a motion moved in the House for that yesterday. Why are we being given only a matter of hours to consider the motion before the House? Why are we being asked to consider legislation before the House on the day that we receive it? Is this the level of openness and transparency that the people of New South Wales can expect from the Government?

A time line was in place for elections for both Shellharbour and Wollongong councils. While we understand the importance of giving the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour a chance to elect their councillors we are concerned about the Government's motives for moving this legislation. It was intended that the administrators for both councils were to serve a four-year term in order to ensure that the public had confidence in their council and its functions before a new council was elected. While in government we acted on the advice of the administrators.

Now that the Government is moving this legislation we on this side of the House can only draw from that that the Government has received advice from the administrators and it is satisfied as to the implementation of reforms. Perhaps the Minister can inform the House in reply whether he has received advice from the administrators at this point that these councils are ready for a return to local elections. We hope that the Government has in fact received that advice from both the administrators of Wollongong council and the administrators of Shellharbour council. But, most importantly, we hope that the Government heeds the administrators' advice because, as the Minister has stated, the issues in Wollongong were so systemic and so concerning that the Independent Commission Against Corruption made a number of recommendations. We hope that those recommendations are fully implemented before the council is returned.

As the Minister rightly stated, the issues very much concerned culture in the organisation. The Minister referred to a report that was recently received by the administrators, and I believe it is the same report I had when I was Minister for Local Government. I would like the Minister to inform the House whether the administrators have in fact supported the return of the council at this stage. One would hope that the work done by the administrators on the cultural change issues and the other issues that Wollongong faced has been finalised and that the administrators are satisfied and support the Government's plan to bring about an election early. Similarly, we would hope that the Government has received advice from the administrators of Shellharbour that the recommendations of the departmental inquiry have been implemented and that the administrators support the Government's plan to go ahead with an election.

As recently as March this year the *Illawarra Mercury* reported that David Jesson, Shellharbour council administrator, doubted the Coalition's time frame for elections. Mr Jesson's position was also that of the original public inquiry conducted by Richard Colley, which recommended that an administrator be appointed until 2012. We hope that these concerns have not been ignored in the drafting of this legislation. The Government should come clean about its motivation for moving this bill.

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The Government must tell this House whether this legislation is a natural consequence of the necessary reforms being implemented ahead of schedule or the political manoeuvring of an inexperienced government in an attempt to generate positive media coverage regardless of the consequences.

There appears to be an inconsistency in the approach being taken by the Minister and the Government in respect of Wollongong City Council and Shellharbour City Council, and the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, which is also under administration. The question must be asked: Why are elections necessary in Wollongong and Shellharbour but not in Port Macquarie? That is especially troubling given that Port Macquarie-Hastings Council has been under administration longer than the other two councils. If the Government believes the time is right for elections in Wollongong and Shellharbour, surely it is time for an election in Port Macquarie. The Government has already demonstrated its interest in the affairs of Port Macquarie-Hastings Council by installing former council officer Neil Porter as administrator. Mr Porter worked on The Nationals-dominated council and his appointment could well stem from the Government's relationship with the dumped council. Not only was it a Nationals-dominated council but also one of the former councillors, Rob Nardella, has found himself a position in the office of the Leader of The Nationals. The Opposition is concerned that of the three councils that are under administration only the council with a Coalition-appointed administrator will not have an election this year. Why is that?

There is a further inconsistency in this legislation. On the one hand, the Government has expressed its concern about the restoration of the democratic rights of the residents of the Illawarra, but on the other it is limiting those same rights by imposing reforms to ward and councillor numbers without community consultation. It is not good enough to say that when the councils are restored they will be able to determine what they want to do. That is not appropriate. The people of Wollongong and Shellharbour should determine the composition of their councils; it should not be imposed from above. Why was this issue not the subject of a referendum so that the good people of these council areas could decide on the model for their local government? This is yet another example of this Government's inexperience. However, more importantly, and what is concerning me, is that it is an example of its arrogance. Rather than giving the community an opportunity to decide on the structure of the council, the Government has adopted a paternalistic attitude and has introduced a series of top-down reforms.

The Government's position has been refuted even by its own members. I congratulate the new member for Port Macquarie on her election to this place. She issued a press release stating the community should decide how they are represented at a local government level and the only way for that to occur is through a referendum. That does not seem to be the case for the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour. The Government seems only too happy to introduce top-down reforms in the Illawarra but not on the mid North Coast. I wonder what the member for Port Macquarie will tell her constituents about this inconsistency and how she will justify it. The local member and at times the Leader of The Nationals have hinted that they do not believe the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council needs to be under administration and that it is time that local democracy was restored. The member for Port Macquarie should tell us today whether she wants her local council restored and what she will do to ensure that happens.

The Minister used the evidence given at a section 740 public inquiry by a former Shellharbour mayor to justify the abolition of wards. After hearing all the evidence, Commissioner Richard Colley recommended a three-ward system. I do not accept the justification for the abolition of the wards provided by the Minister today, despite the fact that it was supported by the evidence provided by one witness at the inquiry. Why should an area of more than 154 square kilometres with diverse geographic and demographic features not have wards? It suggests the creation of a gerrymander in the Shellharbour council area. Is that what this is really about? There is more to this than meets the eye; this legislation does not simply restore local democracy. If the Government were serious about restoring local democracy it would have included the Port Macquarie local government area in this legislation. No promise was made about that during the election campaign.

The Opposition will consider the legislation in more detail before it is debated in the other place to ensure that it is reasonable and practical. We will comment further at that time and will move amendments if they are deemed necessary. I have outlined the Opposition's concerns. We understand the importance of local democracy. When administrators provided advice to the previous Government recommending the restoration of councils on the basis that all necessary reforms had been implemented, it followed that advice. I hope the Minister has received similar advice and that he can clarify it.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast—Speaker) [4.18 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I support the Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Bill 2011. The overview of the bill states that the mayors and councillors of Shellharbour City Council and Wollongong City Council were dismissed by proclamations of the Governor during 2008. Under those proclamations ordinary elections for those positions were due to be held on Saturday 8 September 2012. The object of this bill is to provide for elections for Shellharbour City Council and Wollongong City Council on Saturday 3 September 2011. Bring it on! I am surprised that the member for Auburn does not understand the strong appetite for this legislation and for the elections to be held in 2011 rather than next year. I have visited the areas concerned on many occasions and have spoken to many groups about what happened in Wollongong. I do not need to repeat what has been said about that, but it has been a very sorry saga for the residents of Shellharbour and Wollongong. I think everyone understands that.

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This bill honours a commitment made prior to the election to residents of the Illawarra by the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Coalition, a commitment to see a return to democratically elected local government both for Shellharbour and for Wollongong. I am surprised that concerns were raised by the other side of the House about a return to democracy. Conspiracy theories were raised by the member for Auburn that somehow we were going to impose something on both of these cities that was not warranted and not wanted. If the member had been to either of those cities or had read any media reports, she would understand quite clearly that this is what the residents want. I was pleased to join the Premier—at the time he was Leader of the Opposition—in

Wollongong to make the announcement that we would have a return to local government elections by September this year.

On only the third day of the first sitting of this new Parliament the Government has acted on all sorts of other promises it made, and with this bill it is honouring the commitment it gave to the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour. Through this legislation the Premier has shown a true determination to deliver to the residents of the Illawarra a return to democracy. Over the years, I was the single Liberal representative in the entire area, and that includes up to Heathcote and down to the South Coast.

Mr Anthony Roberts: And a very good one.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: I thank the Minister for his comment. I have been joined by the member for Kiama and the member for Heathcote, and I congratulate them on their election to this place. Over many years I have had the opportunity to meet with stakeholders and community groups, including the Wollongong against Corruption Group. This group grew out of the incidents that occurred in the lead-up to the sacking of Wollongong council and Shellharbour council. Concern has been expressed to me on so many occasions that the administrators would be in place for years and that the people of Wollongong would have no elected representatives. While I do not denigrate in any way the work carried out by the administrators of Wollongong or Shellharbour, I have to say that most citizens were quite surprised that it would be four years before they would have a return to democracy. Residents will be pleased this bill is bringing that forward. I am very excited to see this legislation on only the third day of the sitting of this new Parliament. Congratulations to the Premier!

While Wollongong and Shellharbour councils are not part of the South Coast electorate, anything that happens in the Illawarra is of relevance to the South Coast community. Obviously, I have always been vitally interested in things that happen in the Illawarra; it is an important region for all of us. The Southern Councils Group is made up of representatives of each council that seeks to undertake joint initiatives within the region and works to prevent duplication of effort wherever possible. The function of the Southern Councils Group is to work collectively and represent the region as a whole. Local elected councillors play an important role as part of the Southern Councils Group. The bill seeks to ensure that Wollongong and Shellharbour councils have elected representatives to ensure the community has a voice as part of the Southern Councils Group.

The areas of Wollongong and the Illawarra play an extremely important role in New South Wales. It is home to very important industries, such as coalmining and steel production. It is a city of natural beauty, and I am sure the member for Wollongong, who is sitting opposite, is enthusiastic about contributing to this debate about her city. I know she is extremely proud to be the member for Wollongong. It is a beautiful city. It is home to the University of Wollongong, a leading educational institution. Wollongong and the Illawarra have a great deal to offer the State, and the O'Farrell Government believes residents of Wollongong and Shellharbour should have the opportunity to elect community officials in order to steer this important region into the future and be accountable directly to the people.

The Shellharbour local government area continues to play a significant part in the Illawarra community. It is home to Killalea State Park, a State park to which the member for Kiama, who is present in the Chamber, and the O'Farrell Government, have committed to protecting, as well as the beautiful waters of Shell Cove and Shellharbour Beach. I congratulate the member for Kiama on his work with Killalea State Park. I am pleased the bill enacts suitable reforms to ensure the most appropriate representation for residents in Wollongong and Shellharbour.

Reducing the number of wards in Wollongong brings the council into line with a number of other similar sized councils across New South Wales and encourages more incentive for residents to be involved in the democratic process. The retention of a popularly elected lord mayor in Wollongong also ensures that such a large city will have appropriate representation. The abolition of wards in Shellharbour addresses a critical finding in the public inquiry undertaken after the previous council was dismissed. This reform and a reduction of councillors will ensure better governance for the residents of a Shellharbour city. Unlike the conspiracy theories introduced by the member for Auburn, all these reforms follow the critical findings of the public inquiry into both these councils. At a time when local councils are undertaking reviews of local government plans, community strategic plans and delivery processes, it is vital that elected representatives preside over these undertakings so that the constituents can have faith and pride in their local councils. Constituents have lost a great deal of pride in their local areas.

Anyone who has listened to local radio or local media over the past two or three years would understand that there has been a great loss of pride in the city—not because of what is happening in the city, it is a vibrant and important city, but because of what is happening to their local council. There is strong community support, contrary to the suggestion of the member for Auburn, for the return of democracy to Wollongong and Shellharbour.

I congratulate the member for Kiama, Gareth Ward, on his work and perseverance to ensure that this bill became a priority for the Government, as I did. Long before the election we had a strategy in place to ensure this bill came forward. I am sure the member for Kiama will continue to be a strong voice for his electorate, which encompasses Shellharbour city. Prior to the election and since the election, he has demonstrated he will be a strong representative for his city and his electorate.

Finally, I commend the work of the Wollongong council administrators, Ms Gabrielle Kibble, Dr Col Gellatly, Mr Robert McGregor and Mr Richard Colley, as well as Mr David Jesson in Shellharbour. It has been a challenging job for the administrators but they have worked hard to restore faith and trust in local councils—the trust that we all need to have as local representatives. Unfortunately, that was lost and led to the dismissal of the councils. These administrators have been fine custodians and they have earned the respect of local constituents at the same time. Those constituents are demanding—asking—that their democracy be returned.

The newly elected councils in Wollongong and Shellharbour will see a new era in the Illawarra, one in which elected representatives are accountable and transparent. Once again, Illawarra residents will be able to hold their heads high, knowing that their communities are open and have good governance. I hope that will be restored to them by an O'Farrell Government. I congratulate the Premier and his department on working so hard and, of course, the Minister for Local Government, who has also worked extremely hard to make sure that this initiative and commitment is delivered to the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour today.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [4.28 p.m.]: I contribute to debate on the Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Bill 2011. First, I acknowledge the Speaker of the House, the member for South Coast, and thank her for recognising the beauty, industry and opportunities of the electorate of Wollongong that I am proud to represent. Some questions in relation to the bill need to be asked. While I accept there is a mood to get things done quickly, there is a good sound reason why there is normally an opportunity to take some days to go through the bill. Members may want to move an amendment to the bill, or they may decide they want to support the bill. It is important to have time to consider the wording of proposals in detail so that members' can make informed contributions rather than contributions that are put together hastily.

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I, too, place on record the dedication and hard work of the administrators. It was a very difficult and stressful time for them. They had to deal with significant issues and, along with the banter, quite significant innuendo about the council. Indeed, a number of attempts were made in that innuendo to include me as the member for Wollongong. It is now time to cease besmirching the reputation of Wollongong City Council and to move forward.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption undertook a thorough inquiry into Wollongong City Council and found systemic corruption. It called on the former Labor Government to sack the council. It subsequently did so, appointing three administrators for a term of four years, introducing mechanisms to try to prevent future systemic corruption. Members would agree that systemic corruption occurs over a significant period of time. I understand that the bill contains different proposals for Shellharbour council and Wollongong council with respect to their make-up, wards, representation and how those would be achieved. Therefore, I ask whether there is a policy on the make-up of local governments across-the-board or whether it is to be an ad hoc policy, with different councils having different systems. I ask the Minister to clarify the matter in reply.

I, too, have received numerous phone calls about local council elections. However, on a number of occasions in the past I have said on the public record it was my understanding when the administrators were appointed to Wollongong City Council that they would advise government when they believed the Independent Commission Against Corruption recommendations had been implemented and they were confident the time had come for elections to go ahead. I conclude from where we are at, although I do not have the details, that the Government has received such advice, that the administrators have done a good job and should be commended and they are confident the recommendations have been put in place.

However, if the Port Macquarie-Hastings Council has been under administration for a longer term

than Wollongong or Shellharbour, why does this legislation not encompass all councils? Why is there not a policy with respect to the make-up of all councils and when council elections will take place or will each council, depending on its gerrymander, determine the way council elections move forward? As the member for Auburn stated, it could be that the Government has installed a former council officer under The Nationals-dominated council, Neil Porter, as administrator. Council and ward reforms should be taken to a referendum. Communities should have the opportunity to have some input if the representation on their council is to be changed.

In the past I have stated in this place that the sacking of Wollongong council and the appointment of administrators was democracy at work. The advice of the Independent Commission Against Corruption to government that the council should be sacked and administrators appointed was democracy at work. I agree with the comments of the member for South Coast that the Wollongong community needs to have confidence in its elected council representatives but we need to provide a framework that is free of the kinds of things that occurred over a period of time at Wollongong council, long before my term as the member for Wollongong. It is time now to work together as a community and as a Parliament to ensure that this is done properly so that what happened at Wollongong does not occur again in the near future.

I call on the Government to stop besmirching the reputation of Wollongong as a whole based on the outcome of the Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry into Wollongong council. It has been unfortunate that the entire reputation of the city of Wollongong has been sullied. Indeed, on occasions in this place, through banter, I have been linked to the poor behaviour that has taken place on Wollongong council. It involved a lot more than councillors. When the commission refers to "systemic corruption", it is referring to many more people than those who were elected councillors at the last council election. The citizens of New South Wales deserve to have a clean slate and coming into each election people must have confidence that any systems that allow impropriety or bad behaviour are appropriately dealt with.

I am extremely proud to represent the electorate of Wollongong. I believe it is the most wonderful place in New South Wales. The people are second to none. With the limited time I have had to study the bill—and I do not blame anyone—I believe that instead of tarnishing everybody with the bad behaviour of a few, we should work as a whole for the betterment of the people of New South Wales.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The House should probably take note of those comments of the member for Wollongong especially her comments about Port Macquarie.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [4.38 p.m.]: I support the proposals contained in the Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Bill 2011. The bill reflects the Government's commitment to residents of Wollongong and Shellharbour local government areas to restore democratically elected councillors by holding fresh elections on 3 September 2011, a year earlier than determined by the previous Government. I praise the good work of the Minister for Local Government for again delivering on the commitments made during the election campaign. Time and again we have seen examples of open and transparent government, giving power back to the people.

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I also acknowledge the fine work the administrators have done in Wollongong. I believe they have been working very hard and diligently to remove all traces of the corruption that existed there. I want to read onto the record comments made by our leader Barry O'Farrell, the Premier. He said:

Council decisions have a significant impact upon local communities and it's important that residents elect the people making those decisions.

Labor has denied residents in Wollongong and Shellharbour locally elected representatives since sacking the two Councils in 2008.

The shameful recent history of Wollongong City Council lifted the lid on Labor Party politics in NSW, but it's no reason to deny democracy to the region and the opportunity to elect a new Council.

Mr Deputy-Speaker, you and I share a local government area in the north of the State called the Tweed shire. Both you and I know that Tweed Shire Council was sacked many years ago and it took many years of administration before democracy was returned to the local residents. During that time no consultation took place between the then Labor Government and the residents regarding the new structure; the residents were simply told about it. I am led to believe that the new structure is working rather well at present. I make the point—and it was part of my election campaign in 2007—that Labor parachuted the ex-chief of staff in the Hon. Tony Kelly's office into the area and then dictated how much the local ratepayers would pay her, which was in the vicinity

of \$180,000 a year. There was no consultation with the local residents. The results of many of the decisions that that executive officer made are still being cleaned up today.

I feel sorry for the people of Wollongong. Wollongong is a lovely place. I grew up not far from Wollongong, in the southern suburbs of Sydney. I note that the member for Shellharbour is in the Chamber. The Wollongong-Shellharbour area is a great spot and it provides a good lifestyle. But we need to restore democracy and faith to the area, and I compliment the Minister for Local Government for his actions in that regard. Over the four years of administration in the Tweed I noticed there was a lack of faith in council officers. Council officers in the Tweed needed a council to support them. The administrators did a fine job, but at the end of the day the whole area suffered because of the time it took before democracy was returned to the local residents. I am pleased about the Government's proposal as provided in the bill because it returns democracy to the residents of the Wollongong and Shellharbour area.

Newly democratically elected councils will provide a fresh start and governance structure that will enable them to better represent the interests of their communities which they will be elected to serve. I have been asked time and again in the Tweed, as I am sure the Deputy-Speaker, the member for Lismore, has been asked, "Why can't we elect our people? We don't live in a Third World country." The bill seeks to address that. The Minister for Local Government should be applauded for his actions. Once again the Liberal-Nationals Coalition Government has delivered on another promise. I have been in this Chamber over the past two days and have witnessed the Government deliver on several promises it committed to during the election campaign. Yet when I sat on the other side of the Chamber all I saw on the Government side was spin. I saw delaying actions, a failure to deliver goods and services, and a failure to commit to the good people of New South Wales. I fully support the bill and fully endorse the actions of the Minister for Local Government.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [4.44 p.m.]: I support the Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Bill 2011. The bill will restore democracy to the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour, democracy that has been removed in the past. I will now reflect on some of the history behind that removal of democracy. In the next 14½ minutes—I think I could probably speak about the issue for the rest of the month—I will do my best to encapsulate some of the feelings of the people of Wollongong. No doubt they would be quite put out by what has happened there.

The bill includes a provision for a one-off five-year term for both Wollongong and Shellharbour city councils. I believe that is a great move. It will circumvent the need for another election when local government elections are due in 2011. It will also avoid the cost to Wollongong council, and subsequently the good people of Wollongong, of about \$1 million and some \$300,000 to Shellharbour council and the people of Shellharbour.

As members would be well aware, Wollongong and Shellharbour city councils were placed under administration and since that time the administrators have worked hard to restore some sort of faith in those council areas. The Independent Commission Against Corruption recommended in its report into Wollongong council that 11 people be charged, and the legal system will no doubt take its course. But now is the time to restore democracy to Wollongong. The Wollongong local government area has a substantial population of almost 200,000. It comprises a long coastal area stretching from the Royal National Park to Lake Illawarra. Wollongong city is the third-largest city in New South Wales. As we know, it is a major industrial centre. I believe that Wollongong is now under the cloud of a carbon tax and the potential loss of many thousands of jobs at Port Kembla steelworks. We acknowledge those hardworking people in the steel city.

The Government believes it is important that democracy be restored to Wollongong City Council so that community-elected civic leaders can guide its decisions in the future—hopefully people who are not aligned with the Australian Labor Party. I will deal with that in detail in a moment. The Division of Local Government's guidance to councils on implementing the new planning and reporting requirements supports the Government's decision to restore democracy to Wollongong council immediately. The guidance outlines the key roles that the elected representatives play, including that the Lord Mayor, as spokesperson for council, is the public face of the strategic planning process. That will be a change—that the Lord Mayor will be in charge of strategic planning, as opposed to those who have been in charge of strategic planning in Wollongong for the past decade.

With regard to Shellharbour City Council, the public inquiry noted that the Shellharbour local government area is relatively small in size and now largely consists of a single urban area with a population of around 65,000, about the same size as the Hawkesbury local government area. The

existing ward structure no longer accurately represents the communities which make up the local government area. We have encapsulated in the bill some changes to the wards which we very much hope will improve the democracy on behalf of the residents in the local government area.

It is interesting that the member for Wollongong has come into the Chamber supporting the bill—that is, supporting a return to democracy. I ask someone in the Chamber to explain to the member for Wollongong what democracy is. Democracy is where people vote, where you put people into power and they act on your behalf. It is not a club. It is not a matter of simply having an affiliated union or an Australian Labor Party card; you do not just get elected to Wollongong council. There have been some extraordinary dealings in Wollongong. Labor believes that the people of Wollongong can be taken for granted, that democracy in that area is a plaything, something it can play with and manipulate. The member for Wollongong is conflicted in that manipulation of the democratic system in that area. And it just has not stopped. We have recently had a State election. If one looks up the definition of rorting, scandal and corruption in the dictionary one will find a photo of Noreen Hay there—and it explains it all. And it has not finished, because how-to-vote cards directing Liberal people to vote for the Labor member were distributed at the recent State election.

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Mrs Barbara Perry: Point of order: I ask the member for Hawkesbury to withdraw his disparaging remarks about another member of this House. His remarks were uncalled for and have no basis.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I believe they are completely called for. I am happy to place this evidence on the table: the transcript from *Four Corners*. That will support everything I have said, which is factual and correct and has been out in the public arena.

Mrs Barbara Perry: Further to the point of order: The remarks of the member for Hawkesbury are disparaging to the reputation of the member for Wollongong. The member for Hawkesbury did not quote from the *Four Corners* transcript; they were his remarks and his views.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! I cannot insist that a member withdraw his remarks. The member for Hawkesbury has identified the document from which he quoted. The member for Hawkesbury has the call.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: As I said before, 11 charges have been laid and are going through the legal process at this point in time. I believe one of the people charged was a developer. He and the general manager of the council used to sit around a cafe that became known as the "Table of Knowledge". I do not know why it was called the "Table of Knowledge" because the only thing that had an IQ around that table was the table itself.

Mrs Barbara Perry: Point of order: I have listened to what perhaps may be quotes from the article—I do not have a copy of it—but they in no way refer to the member for Wollongong.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: It is a full transcript. The people who were involved in these charges—and I have the transcript here—were closely associated with the member for Wollongong: developers and council managers. In the transcript a telephone conversation is recorded where one of those people—

Mrs Barbara Perry: Point of order: That is an imputation that the member for Hawkesbury is drawing based on no evidence. The disparaging remarks made by the member for Hawkesbury I take it are not contained in that transcript. I again ask that those remarks be withdrawn by the member.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The member for Hawkesbury is entitled to quote from a document that he has identified. His comments about the member for Wollongong are not disparaging but a matter of public record. There is no point of order. I will not tolerate further interruptions unless the member for Hawkesbury is making disparaging remarks.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: The development taking place at the time of this conversation between the developer and the general manager was called the pavilion project. For that project the council would pick up \$1 million worth of costs. Not only was the developer getting a development supported by the general manager of the council; the general manager was guaranteeing \$1 million worth of costs from the council, which subsequently were from the ratepayers or the 200,000 good people of the Wollongong City Council area. They would agree to all of that: the

general manager and the developer had it all sorted. There was no problem: it was all going through at 100 miles per hour. Then all of a sudden there is a telephone call from the developer to the member for Wollongong. I have the transcript here with the developer saying, "Now do you suggest that I start making contact with the Labor aldermen or should I leave that with you?" If that is not a conflict I do not know what is. It goes on with the member for Wollongong saying: "Yeah you'd better. I'd better get a bit more detail on this ..." and then names the developer. The developer states, "Yeah, cos then you can go and talk to ..." and names councillors on Wollongong City Council. The member for Wollongong states, "Yeah exactly so."

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: The member for Hawkesbury has been allowed to get away with this unparliamentary conduct for many minutes now. The member for Hawkesbury knows—and he should know—that under Standing Order No. 73, whether or not he quotes from a document, personal reflections upon and imputations of improper motives against any member of this place are not permitted except by motion. The matter before the house is not a motion. If he wants to criticise the member for Wollongong he should put a motion on the table.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I may do that.

Mr Michael Daley: The member for Hawkesbury can do that. He should not be doing it now.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The member for Hawkesbury will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr Michael Daley: You are a 100 per cent coward.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: A coward?

Mr Michael Daley: Why do you not walk out there and repeat it again.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: This is something that you can walk out onto the street and state quite clearly. This is a transcript from *Four Corners* of a conversation that the member for Wollongong had with a developer. Here it is. There is a conflict. If that is not a conflict with corrupt activity—

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: Mr Assistant-Speaker, you have already ruled on the point of order and the member for Hawkesbury is canvassing your ruling.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The member for Hawkesbury will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: Everybody in this Parliament knows that there has been a massive conflict. That is why the council was dismissed. When you have a member who is talking to a developer and says she will go and talk to the councillors, if that is not a conflict—

Ms Cherie Burton: You are a coward!

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: A coward? It is a public document. Is the bar open, Mr Assistant-Speaker, because I think the member for Kogarah wants a drink? Maybe we could change the standing orders to get a bit of table service.

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: Mr Assistant-Speaker, with respect to your control of the House at this time, can I say that the member for Hawkesbury is not allowing your early days in the chair to reflect well upon you.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The member for Maroubra should be very careful not to cast aspersions on the Chair.

Mr Michael Daley: No, I am casting aspersions on the member for Hawkesbury. You have called him to order twice and he is refusing to accede to your ruling.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The member for Hawkesbury will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I have firmly established that what I believe and what I have stated is absolutely correct. That this legislation has now been put before this House is reflective on those people down there. The Liberal-National O'Farrell-Stoner Government will insist that democracy is

upheld. The Australian Labor Party may not have wanted to do that. Whilst the former Minister for Local Government was happy to stand up here to try to defend her Australia Labor Party colleagues, she did nothing whatsoever to try to uphold democracy. The Government is more than happy to legislate for these changes and undertake a democratic election—

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: The legislation before the House is very clear: it provides for the establishment and holding of fresh elections in Wollongong. The subject of the bill is the establishment of fresh elections at a certain point in time. I ask the Assistant-Speaker to draw the member for Hawkesbury back to the leave of the bill.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! I have directed the member for Hawkesbury to return to the leave of the bill. The member is entitled to reflect broadly on the reasons why the legislation is before the House at this stage.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I conclude by saying that it is about time the good people of Wollongong and the good people of Shellharbour are able to see some democracy at work. They will no longer see the scandals that have pervaded those areas with the corruption and the manipulation of the voting system. This Government will put in place fresh elections and hopefully the people will be able to elect good, honest councillors—people who will accurately reflect their views—and we will not see developments approved just because massive amounts have been donated to the Australian Labor Party. Good honest people should be elected. I hope that none of the people elected have any affiliation with the Australian Labor Party, and democracy will be returned to the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour.

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Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [4.59 p.m.]: At the outset of my contribution to the Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Bill 2011, I congratulate the Minister for Local Government on his speed in introducing this important bill to the House. This bill, as with the announcement of the abolition of the iniquitous part 3A planning provision, sends a clear message to every council, councillor and mayor in New South Wales that this Government will fix the ills that 16 years of Labor have wrought on local councils and their communities. The councillors dining in the Strangers' dining room tomorrow night for the Local Government Association Cultural Awards will be able to celebrate this bill and the direction of the new Government.

As I have said previously in this place, I am passionate about the importance of local councils and the service and representation they provide to their communities. For the benefit of newly elected members, I was first elected to Port Stephens Shire Council in 1987 and again in 1991. I served as deputy shire president from 1989 to 1991 and as mayor, following the introduction of what we old-timers refer to as the new Local Government Act in 1992, from 1994 to 1995. I had a brief sabbatical, courtesy of voters, and was re-elected in 1999 and again in 2004. I was privileged to serve as mayor for another 2½ years until I stood aside when I sought preselection for the 2007 State election.

Many of the newly elected members of this place are or have served as councillors or mayors. They join the four city mayors who were re-elected. I note the absence of my friend, the member for Lake Macquarie and Mayor of Lake Macquarie. I am sure he would have wanted to contribute to the debate on this bill. I understand he has had to attend a council meeting. Independents who are mayors are able to do so because they do not face the party restrictions placed on Liberal, National and Labor members. They are able to spend more time with their councils. When I was elected as mayor in 2004 I led a brand new council. I ducked away for four weeks and let my 11 councillors get to know one another. It was like leaving 11 roosters in a cage, but they had it all sorted out by the time I got back. I went to visit my son who was in England for his gap year. On the flight I watched every episode of *Grass Roots* on my laptop. *Grass Roots* should be compulsory viewing for all councillors. When I arrived in London I must have been jetlagged because I decided to buy 11 copies of *Grass Roots* to give to my councillors. When I thought about it I realised that would be detrimental because they would be able to see the punches coming from miles away. So I did not recommend the series to the councillors.

I enjoyed my time as mayor greatly. I particularly enjoyed conducting citizenship ceremonies. As a six-year-old I was naturalised in Parramatta Town Hall with my father. My father was Norwegian and as I was a child born overseas I had his citizenship. I have told the story at various citizenship ceremonies that my mother was Australian. Mum and dad married at the end of World War II. My mother was the first foreigner, in Norwegian eyes, to receive automatic Norwegian citizenship when she married my father. When dad became an Australian citizen he lost his Norwegian citizenship. When they returned to Norway dad had to queue up with the other foreigners and my mother went straight through as a Norwegian national, even though she could not speak

Norwegian very well. I have a special love for citizenship ceremonies and I understand how much they mean to those who are granted citizenship.

The job of mayor is mainly about delivering good news, while bad news is delivered by the general manager. I was enjoying my role as mayor when the Lemna Government introduced the coastal policy. In our council area, that policy took away planning powers for significant developments within one kilometre of the waterways between Port Stephens and the Tweed. One of the first buildings approved under that policy was a motel development in Shoal Bay. Shoal Bay is the jewel in the crown of Port Stephens. Previously the height limit had been eight metres. The Department of Planning, under the new coastal policy, approved a 13 metre high building. It was a disastrous policy that upset most people in local government.

In 2004, one of my first initiatives as mayor was to bring the Medowie local area plan before council. I wanted the new council to have input in the plan. At the same time that we approved the plan to double the population of Medowie, the town in which I live, the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy was announced and it was held over our heads. In the subsequent seven years, 70 blocks of land have been rezoned in the Port Stephens local government area. Late last year then Minister Kelly crowed about the success of the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy. If he thinks that 70 blocks in seven years is good news, I would hate to hear the bad news.

The Labor Government introduced the Port Stephens-Great Lakes Marine Park, again without any consultation. I became so frustrated about the Government's actions that in 2007 I ran for preselection for the Liberal Party and I was fortunate to win the seat. Unfortunately, the Coalition was about 15 seats short of victory in the 2007 election. But the great result we had on 26 March this year has rectified that. This bill is the first step in legislation to assist local government. I resigned from Port Stephens council in March 2008, six months following the election, after one of my colleagues called me gutless for not turning up to council to vote. I was unable to do so because Parliament was sitting. Local government councillors understand that Parliament takes precedence, unless you are an Independent and the Mayor of Lake Macquarie. When I resigned I called on the then Minister for Local Government to audit Port Stephens council procedures. I do not infer that they were doing anything wrong but it is a complicated area and if they started to wander down the wrong track procedurally they could call on assistance from the local government department. My plea was ignored.

I called on the Minister for Planning to audit the planning methods used by Port Stephens council. With all the Land and Environment Court rulings and legislation that passes through this place, I do not know how anyone can keep up with the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. I am sure this Government will review that situation. On numerous occasions I called on the member for Auburn when she was the Minister for Local Government to investigate serious leaks in Port Stephens council. I got no result. I have the greatest respect and fondness for the member for Auburn, as do many Coalition members. But I believe she received bad advice in her time as Minister. When I attended the shire conference 11 months ago the then Minister, the member for Auburn, addressed the councillors and general managers, as did the Premier. I was intrigued to hear them say that part 3A was a wonderful planning provision because it meant they did not have to waste their time on planning issues. I was sitting down the front next to Chris Hartcher, the Minister for Resources and Energy and member for Terrigal. We crawled out and got away before the crowd started throwing bread rolls.

This legislation sends a positive message to local government throughout New South Wales. I referred earlier to the *Grass Roots* series. At one stage the producers wrote to all councils asking for suggestions to make another series. If anyone had suggested a storyline similar to the eventual happenings at Wollongong City Council, the producers and directors would have scoffed at them. Wollongong council was an extreme case. I will not comment any further, as the previous speaker spoke on the matter. It is important that the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour are able to elect their councillors.

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It is a great idea that the Minister has determined one five-year term for both councils. The last thing we would want to do is duplicate the election in 12 months time. The councils will get the opportunity to be there for five years. I would like the Minister to investigate the idea that when a council makes a blunder, as Port Macquarie did with the Glasshouse, that perhaps an administrator should sit with the councillors to mentor them and have a casting vote, if I could put it that way, to try to get them back on line. I am not comparing the three councils—they were all sacked for different reasons—but this is a great step.

The member for Auburn said she was not happy with the reduction in the number of wards. I have

looked at the matter for a long time and I do not see that it really matters whether councils have wards or not. Councillors tend to concentrate on where they are popular, because that is where they get elected, and that is usually where they live. Great Lakes Council is a prime example of a small in population but large in area council with a no-ward system, just elected councillors. I have often pointed out that if you live at Hawks Nest or Tea Gardens it is quicker to drive to Singleton than it is to visit your mayor in Forster. This is great legislation. I commend the bill to the House and congratulate the Minister on a fine effort.

Mr DONALD PAGE (Ballina—Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast) [5.11 p.m.], in reply: Firstly, I thank all members who participated in the debate on the Local Government (Shellharbour and Wollongong Elections) Bill 2011: the member for Auburn, the member for South Coast, the member for Wollongong, the member for Tweed, the member for Hawkesbury and the member for Port Stephens. I particularly thank the member for the South Coast, the member for Tweed, the member for Hawkesbury and the member for Port Stephens for their strong support of this legislation.

The member for Auburn and the member for South Coast raised a number of issues. Firstly, they wanted to know why we were in a hurry to get this legislation through Parliament. The main answer to that is because we have a mandate to give democracy back to the people of Wollongong and Shellharbour and there are certain requirements in relation to the public exhibition of boundary changes, particularly for Wollongong where the number of wards is being reduced from six to three. A 30-day exhibition period is required and if we are to get this legislation through and allow for that public exhibition period so that the Boundaries Commission can make any adjustments as a result of that public consultation period before the elections to be held on 3 September, we have to expedite this legislation as quickly as possible.

As the Premier said yesterday, we are in an unusual situation in this first week of the Parliament where we are trying to get through legislation in this House that we believe is essentially non-controversial so that the Legislative Council has legislation to debate. It is not normal practice that we do this, and it is certainly something that I have never supported, but I note that the Labor Government did this consistently. The former Government would drop legislation with no consultation and give no time for consultation with stakeholders. I am not comfortable with that, but the reality is that in order to reach a deadline and promise of 3 September we need to do things as we are doing them. I go back to the initial point, which is that we have a strong mandate in relation to the election result and an obligation—because we are a Government that wants to deliver on our promises—to expedite this matter in the way we are.

The second issue raised by both the member for Auburn and the member for Wollongong was in relation to the Independent Commission Against Corruption recommendations. The members raised a very valid point. The former Minister indicated that when she was Minister for Local Government she did not receive in her correspondence an indication from the administrators that the issues had been addressed. I can advise the House that on 27 April I received, as the new Minister, a letter from the administrators indicating that the issues that were raised in the Independent Commission Against Corruption report in fact have been addressed. Page two of the letter states:

All recommendations of the ICAC relevant to Council flowing from the Atlas hearing have been implemented.

I indicated earlier in my agreement in principle speech the five issues that the administrators had particularly addressed which had turned the culture around. I hope that clarifies the issue. The Independent Commission Against Corruption recommendations have been implemented by the administrators.

Both the member for Auburn and the member for Wollongong raised the question of the inconsistency between Wollongong and Shellharbour. I tried to explain the reason for the inconsistency in my agreement in principle speech. It is essentially because of the larger geographical area of the Wollongong City Council; it is a much bigger area both in population and in geographical terms and therefore it is more appropriate that we have more councillors. I also indicated that in relation to Shellharbour, recommendations flowed from the public inquiry that led to the council being sacked. A number of witnesses and the council itself gave evidence to the inquiry and said that as far as they were concerned there were too many councillors and too many wards. We have made a decision that there will be seven councillors and no wards and that there will be a mayor elected from one of those councillors.

If it turns out in the future—and this applies both to Wollongong and to Shellharbour—that the

community is not happy with those arrangements then obviously there will be an opportunity at a future time to change that. If the people of Shellharbour want to go back to a popularly elected mayor they can have a referendum. The former Minister for Local Government knows that these things can happen. We are not setting anything in concrete here; we are making a decision to enable democracy to prevail.

A couple of points were made in relation to community consultation, which was an issue at the election. As I said, it is imperative that we meet a deadline. In an ideal world we possibly would have consulted people more than we have but we have this requirement to honour our promise and I hope that all members of the House, including those on the other side, will be committed to the restoration of democracy at the local level in both these council areas.

The member for Wollongong raised an issue about how we should try to develop a policy about local government areas: whether we have wards or not, how many councils, and so on. It is a fair point to make. The history of wards is quite interesting—not that I am an expert. Apparently, in the early days of local government the boundaries were determined by how far a person could ride a horse in a particular day or a couple of days. Some might say that we have not come very far since then in relation to being able to get a consistent set of criteria for determining exactly how many wards there should be per head of population or how many councils there should be. The Act is quite broad in relation to councillors; it states that a council may have between five and 15 councillors. I make the point, without being political, that the Government had 16 years to address an issue such as that. We have been in government for less than a month. With all due respect, the former Government did nothing about the issue. But I take on board the comments by the member for Wollongong about how desirable it may be to get more consistent criteria in relation to these matters.

In relation to besmirching the Wollongong area, there is no question that the council behaved appallingly and that there was endemic corruption, and, as the member for Wollongong said, not just the last lot of councillors but going back many years.

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The Government was quite right to sack that council, just as it was right to sack Shellharbour City Council. I am satisfied that the administrators at both councils have done a fantastic job. I acknowledge the current Wollongong City Council administrators, Colin Gellatly, Robert McGregor and Richard Colley and the former administrators, including Gabrielle Kibble, and the Shellharbour City Council administrator David Jesson. I thank them for the constructive and productive manner in which they have dealt with the endemic corruption in Wollongong and the dysfunction in Shellharbour.

The member for Wollongong pleaded with members not to besmirch the reputation of her electorate. I tried in my agreement in principle speech to make it clear that the situation has changed and that the administrators have assured me that it is much better. I therefore did not appreciate the attempts to besmirch the reputation of Neil Porter, who was recently appointed as the administrator at Port Macquarie-Hastings Council. By all reports he is not a political person and he has 30 years of experience in administration of local government. I am told that his appointment has been widely welcomed.

The two Labor members who spoke in this debate raised some concerns and criticisms. However, they did not offer any alternative method of addressing these issues. Under this legislation the people of both Wollongong and Shellharbour will be able to determine who will represent them at the local government level. That will occur 12 months ahead of the timetable proposed by the former Government, which scheduled the elections for September 2012.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

Bill declared passed and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL Personal Explanation

Ms NOREEN HAY, by leave: As I feared, the member for Hawkesbury has once again sought to

impugn my reputation. I will correct the record yet again: I have never been at nor have I been invited to sit at the so-called table of knowledge. I have also not been found to have been inappropriately involved with anyone. The former Premier was advised by the Independent Commission Against Corruption that I was not a person of interest in any of its inquiries into Wollongong City Council. I hope this is the last time I need to correct the record in that regard.